Transition to Secondary School: Student Achievement and Teacher Practice

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The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

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PUBLICATIONS

The author acknowledges that the following publications derive from this research:

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the impact that transition, the move students make from Year 6 to Year 7, had upon adolescent students' reading and spelling achievement. The research also sought to investigate teachers' perceptions of the transition phase. Based on Vygotsky's socio-cognitive learning theory and his notion of a student's zone of proximal development (ZPD), the study was guided by six research questions. Three questions explored the impact of transition on students' literacy achievement as determined by the *Progressive Achievement Test in Reading (PAT-R)* and the *Single Word Spelling Test (SWST).* These included an exploration of the type of transition students undertook (internal transition, staying on the same campus or external transition, changing school campuses) and school socioeconomic status (SES). Three questions were also asked to gather data about the types of programs and practices teachers were using to teach literacy and prepare students for the transition into secondary school.

Ten coeducational government schools from the state of Tasmania were chosen for the research. A combination of primary, secondary and district schools from both rural and urban areas were included. Two groups of participants were included in the investigation: students and teachers. Student participants consisted of 244 adolescents, who ranged in age from 11 to 13 years old. A total of 19 teachers from primary, secondary and district schools constituted the second participant group. The research took place over three phases. In phase 1, students completed the *PAT-R* and *SWST* whilst in their final year of primary school (Year 6). In phase 2, students completed the *PAT-R* and the *SWST* for a second time after they had transitioned to secondary school (Year 7); and in phase 3, teacher participants undertook a series of one-on-one interviews with the researcher.

Data were analysed using a mixed methods approach. Students' test data were analysed quantitatively using a series of statistical analyses, including *ANOVA* and *MANOVA*

tests. The analysis revealed that, for the overall cohort, students' *PAT-R* scores significantly declined from Year 6 to Year 7. In comparison, students' *SWST* scores remained steady from Year 6 to Year 7. Students from only one school experienced increases in both their *PAT-R* and *SWST* scores across transition. Teacher participant data were analysed qualitatively using a modified approach to thematic analysis, and three common patterns emerged from this analysis. The results revealed that teachers from separate primary and secondary school campuses engaged in less communication than teachers from district schools. Primary and secondary school teachers also perceived a greater lack of curriculum continuity and awareness between Year 6 and Year 7 than district school teachers. All teacher participants stated that an increase in teacher support was needed to enhance the transition experience for students.

In conclusion, this study presents three distinctive contributions to the understanding of the primary to secondary transition. First, attention needs to be paid to the transition phase and the impact this can have upon students' literacy achievement. Second, greater communication and increased levels of curriculum continuity and awareness are needed between primary and secondary school campus teachers. Finally, an increase in teacher support is needed to enable teachers to promote and support successful transition experiences.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

Transition	The progression students undertake from the end of primary school (Year 6) to the first year of secondary school (Year 7).
Internal Transition	The transition from primary school to secondary school whereby students move from Year 6 to Year 7 within the same school campus.
External Transition	The transition from primary school to secondary school whereby students move from one school campus at the end of Year 6, to another school campus at the beginning of Year 7.
Primary School	The institution where students receive the first stage of their education. Within the context of this study, primary school includes Foundation to Year 6, and students are typically aged between 5 and 12 years old.
Secondary School	The institution where students receive the second stage of their education. Within the context of this study, secondary school includes Year 7 to Year 10 and students are typically aged between 11 and 16 years old.
District School	The institution where students receive the first and second stages of their education. District schools cater for students from Kindergarten to Year 12 within the same campus.
Adolescence	The transitional stage of physical and psychological development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to adulthood. Adolescnce can begin prior to the teenage years.
Reader's Notebook	A teaching resource designed to encourage reflection, inquiry, critical thinking and dialogue about reading. The Reader's

	Notebook aims to help students make connections between texts and genres, connect reading and writing, engage in active discussion, and examine the craft of writing.
Writer's Notebook	A teaching resource used to encourage students to engage in the writing process. The notebook is often called a "seed bed" and provides a place for students to express their ideas through writing, and to develop these ideas to a finished product.
PAT-R	Progressive Achievement Test in Reading
SWST	Single Word Spelling Test
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
SES	Socioeconomic Status

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Research Overview

This research was an investigation into the transition phase, the move students make from primary school to secondary school. The transition phase has been regarded as one of the most significant times in a student's educational career (West, Sweeting & Young, 2010), and this research was conducted in an attempt to develop further understandings of this important educational step and the impact it can have on students' academic achievement in school. Through a focus on students' literacy achievement and teachers' literacy practice, this research explored how and why the transition to secondary school can be such a momentous time for a young adolescent student.

This chapter presents the framework for the current research. It begins with a discussion of the research problem and then proceeds to outline the purpose of the research in addition to the research questions. The research approach, research context and research significance are also discussed. Finally, this chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis.

The Problem

For most adolescent students who participate in formal education, the academic journey through school should be relatively straightforward. It is a commonly made assumption that, as adolescents progress through their education, their academic capabilities will improve from one year to the next. However, research evidence suggests that this is not always the case, and despite many years of reform efforts, government initiatives and implementation plans, the demands of school and school life continue to be a challenge for many young adolescent students (Alspaugh, 1998; Freebody, 2007; Hanewald, 2013).

One area that presents particular challenges for students is literacy learning. The reports from teachers and educators about the number of adolescent students who struggle in the area of literacy continue to be an increasing issue in education (Benner, 2011; Hanewald, 2013; Pervin, 2005). Past research and government reports (see Dugdale & Clark, 2008) have proposed that literacy levels in the adolescent years are in decline; so much so that some adolescents fail to achieve the required grade level standards by the time they leave school or drop out of school early without the necessary literacy skills to read or write at a functional level (Snipes & Horwitz, 2008). As a consequence, these students fail to acquire the adequate skills needed for active participation in contemporary society later in their lives. This is concerning as it has been found that entering the workforce or entering further education can become increasingly difficult for these students (Ailwood, 2001; Bronzo, 2010; Freebody, 2007; Goiran-Bevelhimer, 2008; Lingard; 2011, Mills, 2003).

A number of researchers and government departments have investigated the causes for the decline in adolescent students' literacy achievement and a multitude of factors have been proposed. Family life (Topping, 2011), socioeconomic factors (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008), pedagogical practices (Hattie, 2003), and developmental factors and the onset of adolescence (West et al., 2010) are just a few that have been explored extensively in the literature. One factor that has been proposed as a cause for students' underachievement in literacy is the transition phase, defined for the context of this research as the move students make from primary school (Year 6) to secondary school (Year 7). It is well documented that the transition phase can be a particularly challenging time for the adolescent student (Alspaugh, 1998; Coffey, Berlach, & O'Neill, 2011; Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Hanewald, 2013; Huggins & Knight, 1997; Migdley et al., 2000; Topping, 2011). One particular area that has been reported to present significant challenges for students is academic achievement. Researchers have suggested that the transition phase can have a detrimental impact upon the

academic achievement of adolescent students (Hanewald, 2013; McGee, Ward, Gibbons, & Harlow, 2004; Topping, 2011) whereby, for some students, academic scores declined as they transitioned from primary to secondary school (Topping, 2011). While a number of researchers have explored the relationship between transition and student achievement, there are numerous gaps in what is known about the transition phase and its impact upon young adolescents (McGee et al., 2004). Most importantly, there is a shortage of information regarding the link between the transition from primary to secondary school and adolescents' literacy achievement (Du Toit & Bouwer, 2009). Although research is emerging in this area, much remains to be done to understand why many students struggle with their literacy learning and the role the transition phase plays in this.

The Research

Research purpose.

This research was directed by two specific aims. First, this research aimed to investigate whether the transition phase, the move from primary school to secondary school, had an impact upon the literacy achievement of adolescent students in the specific areas of reading and spelling. Second, this research aimed to explore the types of literacy programs and practices Year 6 and Year 7 teachers were using in their classrooms to teach English/literacy, and to prepare students for the transition into secondary school. This research also examined socioeconomic factors, type of school and type of transition as additional variables. By placing a multilayered focus on the research, it was hoped that a greater understanding of adolescent students' achievement in literacy across transition would be achieved.

Research questions.

To achieve the aims of this research and guide its undertaking, the following research questions were developed:

1. Does the transition from primary school into secondary school have an impact upon adolescent students' literacy achievement as determined by the *PAT-R* (Stephanou, Anderson & Urbach, 2008) and the *SWST* (Sacre & Masterson, 2000) scores?
2. Do students who transition into secondary school externally experience greater declines in their literacy achievement as determined by the *PAT-R* and the *SWST* than students who transition into secondary school internally?
3. Do students from schools located in higher socioeconomic areas perform better on the *PAT-R* and *SWST* than students from schools located in low socioeconomic areas during the transition phase?
4. What literacy practices and programs do teachers in primary schools, secondary schools and district schools use to prepare adolescent students for the demands of secondary school literacy?
5. What methods do teachers in primary schools, secondary schools and district schools use to prepare students for the transition phase?
6. What methods do teachers perceive as being most necessary for the promotion of literacy development in adolescent learners across the transition phase?

Research approach.

To explore each of the research questions, a mixed methodological design was used for data collection and analysis. To determine the impact of transition upon students' test achievement, a quantitative approach was used to collect student test scores and analyse these

scores using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v.18). To explore teachers' perceptions of the transition phase and identify the types of programs and practices they were using in their classrooms, a qualitative approach was adopted by means of one-on-one semi-structured interviews. These were analysed using a modified approach of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006).

A mixed methods design was chosen as combining quantitative and qualitative methods enabled a better understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2008); the quantitative test scores were able to be further explained by the qualitative interview data provided by the teachers. Through better understanding what the teachers were doing in their classrooms, stronger conclusions could be made in regards to the relationships between teacher practice and student achievement across the transition from primary to secondary school. The research approach and design is discussed at length in Chapter 3: Methodology.

Research context.

This research was conducted in ten coeducational government schools located across the state of Tasmania, Australia. In Tasmania, the education system is divided into two systems: the independent/private system and the government/public system. Much of the independent/private system is typically sponsored by boards, religious organisations or the Catholic Education Department. Some independent schools are operated by semi-secular educational philosophies; however, the majority are religious. This research was conducted in the government/public system, which is managed primarily by the Department of Education (DoE). The DoE is responsible for all aspects of a student's education, including schooling, adult education and vocational learning.

Schooling in Tasmania is broken into three components: primary school, secondary school and senior secondary school (also known as college). Table 1 shows the breakdown of year levels for each type of school.

Table 1

Years of Education in Primary School, Secondary School and College

Years in School	**Preparatory**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**
Type				Primary School						Secondary School		College	

Note. This information is applicable for Tasmanian government/public schools.

The structure of government schooling in Tasmania differs slightly from other parts of Australia. In most Tasmanian government schools, primary school comprises Kindergarten to Year 6. At the end of Year 6, students will then transition into secondary school, which comprises Year 7 to Year 10. Upon completion of Year 10, students move to senior secondary school to complete Year 11 and Year 12. Some government schools in Tasmania operate on a Kindergarten to Year 12 model; however, within this model the distinction in years for primary, secondary and senior secondary schools remains the same. Within the government system, Tasmania has 138 primary schools, 57 secondary schools and 8 senior secondary schools (Year 11 and Year 12). Of the secondary schools, 26 are district schools where primary and secondary students are located on a single campus from Kindergarten to Year 10 or 12, depending on the school. In Tasmania, the minimum age to begin school is 5 years old and students are required to remain in formal education until they are 17 years of age (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013).

The structure of schooling and the age at which students are required to commence and depart schooling differs in other states and territories across Australia.

Table 2 summarises the primary and secondary school structures, minimum age of commencement and age of departure for each state and territory within Australia.

Table 2

Summary of School Structure and School Age for Australian States and Territories

State/Territory	Preparatory Year (first year of school)	Month of and age at commencement for Year 1	Primary schooling	Secondary schooling	Minimum school leaving age
New South Wales	Kindergarten	January, 5 turning 6 by 31 July	Kindergarten Years 1–6	Years 7–12	17 Years
Victoria	Preparatory	January, 5 turning 6 by 30 April	Preparatory Years 1–6	Years 7–12	17 Years
Queensland	Preparatory	January, 5 turning 6 by 31 July	Preparatory Years 1–7	Years 8–12	17 Years
South Australia	Reception	January, 5 Years 6 months by 1 January	Reception Years 1–7	Years 8–12	17 Years
Western Australia	Pre-primary	January, 5 turning 6 by 30 June	Pre-primary Years 1–7	Years 8–12	17 Years
Tasmania	Preparatory	January, turning 6 by 1 January	Preparatory Years 1–6	Years 7–12	17 Years
Northern Territory	Transition	January, 5 turning 6 by 30 June	Transition Years 1–6	Years 7–12	17 Years
Australian Capital Territory	Kindergarten	January, 5 turning 6 by 30 April	Kindergarten Years 1–6	Years 7–12	17 Years

Note. Information collected from data on the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority website (ACARA, 2011).

As can be seen from Table 2, the age at which students make the transition from primary to secondary school varies across Australia. In New South Wales (NSW), Victoria, Northern Territory, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Tasmania, the transition occurs between Year 6 and Year 7 when students are around 12 years of age. For the

remaining states, the transition takes place between Year 7 and Year 8, when students are around 13 Years old. Regardless of whether a school is government/public or independent/private, all schools have access to the Australian Curriculum, which has been designed to promote continuity in learning from primary to secondary to senior secondary school (ACARA, 2013).

Significance of the Research

The transition from primary school to secondary school is something that all students who participate in formal education will undertake during their educational career. Helping students make a successful transition into secondary schools is essential to ensuring students progress through school without disruptions to their learning. Researchers have identified that the transition phase can be a difficult time for many young adolescents on a social (Akos, 2006), emotional (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000), and academic level (West & Schwerdt, 2012); the latter was the central concern of this research. Although studies have been conducted which investigated student achievement across the transition phase, a trend indicating a decline in students' achievement across transition has continued to be a concern. This is particularly true for literacy, a discipline area which has received relatively little attention in transition research (Du Toit & Bouwer, 2009).

Literacy is embedded in contemporary life and learning, and for those individuals who do not possess strong literacy capabilities, their ongoing successful participation in many aspects of society can be particularly difficult. There is research literature that suggests that low literacy levels can deprive and limit young adults later in their life, producing social, economic and cultural exclusion which can severely impact individuals, and their ability to relate to communities and workplaces (Dugdale & Clark, 2008). It has also been reported that an individual's literacy abilities correlate significantly with an individual's happiness and

success (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004). While the ramifications of poor literacy skills and the advantages of strong literacy skills have been well documented for some time (Dugdale & Clark, 2008), literacy has continued to be a focus for educators and researchers.

There currently exists a body of knowledge in regards to both the transition phase of students into secondary school and adolescents' literacy achievement; however, there has been minimal research that has explored the relationship between these two areas (Du Toit & Bouwer, 2009; McGee et al., 2004). Specifically, little research has been conducted that explores the impact of transition upon adolescents' achievement in literacy assessments in the areas of reading and spelling. This research was conducted, therefore, to add to the research field by exploring and developing understandings of adolescents' literacy achievements as they transition from primary to secondary school.

To enhance the research investigation, a number of additional variables were also explored. These included SES, type of transition, type of school and teachers' practices. Although the relationship between students' home socioeconomic factors have been well documented in relation to both students' achievement in literacy and their transition into secondary school, there has been minimal research that has explored the relationship between the type of school and transition (Towns, 2011) and teachers' practices during transition. Accordingly, this research addressed these gaps by bringing these variables together into the one research study.

This research is also unique for a number of additional reasons:

Australian focus.

Minimal research has been conducted on the transition phase in Australian schools (Coffey et al., 2011; Ferguson & Fraser, 1999; Towns, 2011). The vast majority of transition research has taken place in the Unites States (Alspaugh, 1998; Benner, 2011; Cauley &

Jovanovich, 2006; Reyes, Gillock, Kobus & Sanchez, 2000), the United Kingdom (Galton, Gray & Ruddock, 1999; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Topping, 2011; West et al., 2010), as well as in New Zealand (Cox & Kennedy, 2008). The structure of the school system varies in these countries compared with Australia and therefore the research evidence from international studies may not be directly applicable to Australian schools. There is a need, therefore, to conduct transition research in Australian schools in order to better understand the process of transition, and to more effectively support students, in Australian school settings.

Relationships between literacy and transition were explored.

As mentioned above, although adolescent literacy achievement and student transition have been explored in the research literature, minimal research has been conducted on the relationship *between* these two areas. This study not only contributes to the research field by exploring the impact of transition upon students' literacy achievement in the area of reading, but it also explores the impact of transition on students' spelling achievement, an area that has not been covered in the literature.

Type of transition was explored.

Much of the research that examines the transition phase has focused on external transitions, where students move from one campus to another. There is a lack of research that explores student transition taking place within the same campus, or internal transition. The present research addresses this gap through a comparison of the literacy achievement of students who transitioned internally and those who transitioned externally.

Teachers' perceptions, programs and practices were explored.

Whilst teachers' perceptions of the transition phase have been investigated in the literature (Topping, 2011; Zeedyk et al., 2003), the research evidence is somewhat limited. The present research adds to the breadth of this literature through its exploration of teachers' perceptions of the transition phase. In addition, it also explores the types of programs and practices primary, secondary and district school teachers were using in their classrooms to prepare students for the transition phase and for secondary school literacy.

The research was multifaceted.

Research into the transition phase has been conducted across a number of areas, including the impact of transition upon adolescents' social, emotional and psychological wellbeing. Transition research has also explored teachers', parents' and students' perceptions of transition, the impact of SES factors, peer influences, as well as the structural organisation of primary and secondary schools, teacher pedagogy and academic achievement. While it is evident that the focus on transition has been conducted across a number of areas, the research has tended to focus on these areas in isolation. The present research is unique in that it examined the relationship between adolescent literacy achievement, the transition phase, socioeconomic factors, type of school, and teacher perspectives and practices within the one study. Through this multifaceted approach, this research aimed to bridge the gap between these variables and develop understandings as to why many adolescents struggle in their literacy learning as they progress through school, and how this can be addressed.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective of this research was drawn mainly from Lev Vygotsky's (1896-1934) socio-cognitive learning theory and his notion of a student's zone of proximal development (ZPD). The work of Vygotsky has become the foundation of much research and theory on cognitive development over the past several decades, particularly for what has become known as socio-cognitive theory. Vygotsky's theory placed emphasis on the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition, as he believed that society plays a central role in the process of making meaning. According to Vygotsky, humans are not autonomous or free from external interferences and, as a result, cognitive development, even when carried out by an individual in isolation, is a result of socially evolved and socially organised cultural tools (Farrall, 2012). Therefore, Vygotsky proposed that in order to understand the mental functioning of an individual, the social and cultural processes in which these are embedded must be taken into account. That is, an individual's cognitive development is determined by external factors. He claimed that the social origins of mental functioning could be found in what he referred to as the general genetic law of cultural development:

> Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. ... Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships. (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 163)

The statement above outlined Vygotsky's belief that mental functioning does not begin first and foremost with the individual, but between people on what he called the

intermental plane, where learning is derivative and emerges through social interactions. Vygotsky proposed that the cultural tools a child receives from the social environment through interactions with others (such as parents, peers and teachers) are essential for enabling the human mind to grow. One of the most significant aspects of the socio-cognitive theory is that mental functioning is viewed as an action in which the mind is understood to be "extending beyond the skin" (Wertsch & Tulviste, 2012, p. 59), where mind, cognition and memory are considered to be not attributes of an individual, but attributes carried out through social processes. According to Vygotsky (1981), in order to analyse an individual's mental functioning, one must look beyond the individual to the individual's society and cultural environment.

Vygtosky's views about the social origins of learning led to the development of two important principles which have had significant influence upon the field of education: the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the ZPD. The MKO is an individual who has a better understanding, or a higher cognitive ability level, than the learner with respect to a particular task, process or concept. The MKO is most commonly regarded as a teacher or a parent, but they can also be a peer (McLeod, 2013).

Vygotsky's ZPD is characterised by a general psychological perspective on child development and is linked with a pedagogical perspective on instruction, with the underlying concept that psychological development and instruction are socially embedded. In order to understand them, the surrounding society must also be analysed and understood (Hedegaard, 2012). The ZPD is the difference between what a student can achieve independently and what a student can achieve with the guidance of a skilled partner (Farall, 2012; McLeod, 2013), also known as the MKO. Vygotsky described the ZPD as follows:

> The child is able to copy a series of actions which surpass his or her own capacities, but only within limits. By means of copying, the child is able to perform much better when together

> with and guided by adults than when left alone, and can do so with understanding and independently. The difference between the level of solved tasks that can be performed with adult guidance and help and the level of independently solved tasks is the zone of proximal development. (1981, p. 117)

When situated in an educational context such as the present research, Vygotsky's theory about the benefits of collaborative social learning was that students who work on a cognitive problem with a skilled partner are able to solve tasks that they would not be able to solve alone. In other words, the ZPD is the distance between a students' individual problem-solving capacity and the level of potential development that can be achieved by working with a MKO. This type of collaborative interaction enables students to master cognitive concepts and assimilate new knowledge and extend the ZPD to a more developmentally advanced ability. Vygotsky firmly believed that a student's cultural environment was the major determiner of the extent of development that can be achieved (Peterson, 2010). This research explored the notion of the ZPD and the societal influences that impacted a student's learning as they transitioned from primary school to secondary school.

Thesis Structure

The thesis begins with a description of the research problem that formed the basis of this investigation. It presents the aims and research questions, as well as a description of the research approach. The significance and timeliness of this research for the wider educational community is also outlined. Chapter 2: Literature Review, positions the study within the context of the relevant research. It presents a review of the academic literature in regards to adolescents' literacy achievements and the transition phase. A review of government reports and policy documents is also included. Chapter 3: Methodology describes and clarifies the

methods used for the research, and outlines the overall aim of the research in addition to presenting the research questions. The fourth chapter: Results, presents the findings from the research, and the fifth chapter: Discussion, is a discussion and explanation of these findings in relation to the existing body of knowledge. Each research question is addressed and implications are outlined. Chapter 6: Conclusion presents a summary of the research, the research findings and then provides recommendations for future research, policy and practice. The chapter, and thesis, concludes with some final remarks.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of the literature has been written to address two main purposes. First, this review presents a background of the key areas related to this research: transition and literacy. The chapter then provides a summary of the academic literature related to the transition phase and adolescents' achievement in literacy. A discussion of the relationship between these two areas is also provided. The second purpose of the review of literature is to identify the gaps that currently exist in the literature in regards to adolescents' literacy achievement across the transition phase, and to highlight the significance and importance of this study for schools, teachers and the wider educational community.

Upper Primary and Lower Secondary

Since the second half of the twentieth century, educators and governing bodies have been increasingly concerned with student competency at school during the period from upper primary to lower secondary, often termed the middle years. A repeated concern for educators was in regards to the transition of students from primary to secondary schools. For example, in 1967, the Plowden Report reviewed the structure of the education system and indicated that problems existed between the primary and secondary school structures, as well as the age at which students engaged in transition. The report proposed that:

> The age of transfer to secondary school should be raised to twelve. We doubt whether a single school can provide entirely satisfactorily for children from five to twelve … It is unlikely to justify a staff varied enough in their abilities and interests to meet the needs of

> older children. We conclude that the most suitable organisation of primary schools is in separate middle schools. (p. 159)

In response to this report, the first middle school was opened in England in the late 1960s and, since this time, middle schools have been viewed as a zone of transition between primary and secondary schooling (Hargreaves, 1986). Middle school approaches have also been well documented within the Australian context. The Wyndham Report (1955), commissioned in NSW, stated that action needed to be taken to support those students who found the middle years of schooling difficult, and to ensure a quality of education that would be appropriate in addressing the unique needs of the adolescent learner. The report outlined a number of ways to address the problems that were evident in middle school education. It was suggested that all students should proceed to secondary education without examination, but with attention paid to students' achievement in the final year of primary school and first year of secondary school. The report proposed that students should transition to secondary school at the average age of 12-and-a-half years, and that primary and secondary school staff should know more about each other's objectives and problems. Finally, for a smooth progression, especially in the first year of secondary school, the report stated that the curricula of both primary and secondary schools should be examined conjointly.

Since the Plowden Report (1967), there have been a number of recommendations and policy initiatives that have focused on ways to improve the transition experience for young adolescent learners. In the 1990s, a series of reports were published as part of the National Middle Schooling Project that was taking place in Australia, such as *From Alienation to Engagement: Opportunities for Reform in the Middle Years of Schooling* (Cumming, 1996; Cormack, 1996), *Beyond the Middle: A Report about literacy and numeracy development of target group students in the middle years of schooling* (Luke et al., 2003) and *Shaping Middle Schooling in Australia: Report of the National Middle Schooling Project* (Barratt, 1998).

These reports revealed a number of challenges which existed between upper primary and lower secondary education. The reports indicated that not all students were reaching the desired educational outcomes within the traditional structure of primary and secondary schooling, suggesting that a focus needed to be placed on students in Year 5 to Year 8. The curriculum, school organisation, teacher pedagogy and the physical structure of the school environment were highlighted as key areas of focus. Specific recommendations from such reports included the need for more research into middle years education, the implementation of literacy and numeracy projects, collaboration of middle years staff and funding for professional development (Barratt, 1998).

The focus on middle school education and the concern for young adolescent learners was not resolved in the 1990s, as educators were continuing to identify challenges in education. Atkin (2001) proposed a number of elements to enhance learning in the middle years of schooling and concluded that collaborative team approaches, a stronger focus on students and teachers, cross curricular and integrated learning approaches, and authentic assessment were key elements for enhancing middle years education.

Following on from this, a Queensland Government report, *The Middle Phase of Learning State School Action Plan* (Education Queensland, 2004), was also commissioned to address the concerns surrounding middle years education. This report identified that, while innovative teachers and diverse teaching practices could lead to student success in the middle years, this success was generally localised within particular schools and often dependent upon the motivation and enthusiasm of specific individuals. The aim of the action plan was to develop resources and methods that could support students in the middle years and be generalised across the state into a system-wide implementation. It was proposed that alignment in three areas, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, would bring greater consistency and rigour to the middle years, with a focus on five key areas: legitimising the

middle phase of learning and embedding it in school planning and frameworks, improving and connecting the curriculum, lifting achievement in literacy and numeracy by raising the standards, supporting and recognising teachers, and bridging the gap between the primary and secondary years through improving continuity, information and curriculum and pedagogy across the middle years.

More recently, *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008) also proposed the need to focus on and enhance middle years education in Australia, indicating that few improvements in terms of meeting the transition needs of students from a primary focussed education to a secondary focussed education had been made. This report recognised that the middle years were "an important period of learning, in which knowledge of fundamental disciplines is developed, yet … a time when students are at the greatest risk of disengagement from learning" (p. 12). The declaration stated the need to tailor approaches to teaching and learning activities during the middle years that specifically consider the needs of middle school students. A key finding was that effective transitions between primary and secondary schools were important for ensuring students' success. Despite previous research and the numerous reports commissioned by Australian government bodies, the issues surrounding students and their success during their middle years of education continue to be a topic of debate, concern, and focus in Australia. Despite proposals, goals, action plans and recommendations, previous research literature and policy reports suggest that there are difficulties for students in the middle school education years. It is therefore an area that needs to be further addressed. Indeed, the Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations (2005) reported that:

> There is little research evidence available in Australia on the effect of middle schooling on student outcomes. Most of the numerous studies published consist of advocacy or focus on

> student and teacher attitudes rather than actual outcomes for students. Little data has been collected on the effect on student achievement. (p. 3)

When discussing middle years education, it is important that distinctions be made between the terms middle years, middle school and middle schooling. The middle years have been variously defined in either age ranges, school years or grades (Chadbourne, 2003). In a broad sense, the middle years refer to youth aged from 10 to 15 years old (Dinham & Rowe, 2008). A middle school refers to an organisational unit for young adolescents, which can be separate from primary and secondary school, or integrated within a school, and caters for students in Year 5 to Year 8 (although these year levels may vary). Middle schooling is a particular philosophy about teaching, learning and the curriculum for young adolescents, responsive and appropriate to the needs of adolescent students (Chadbourne, 2003). The middle years were of particular interest to the present research, as not only do they bridge the period from pre-pubescence to adolescence, they also include the year levels from upper primary and lower secondary school: two distinct forms of schooling in terms of curriculum delivery, structure and approach (Dinham & Rowe, 2008).

The age and year levels that define middle years education vary depending on the country. In the United Kingdom, for example, students attending middle schools are typically aged between 8 and 12 years old. In New Zealand, the middle years comprise Years 7 and 8, and in the United States, the middle years take place anywhere between Year 6 and Year 9. In Australia, the middle years fall between Year 5 and Year 8. Research has also identified that middle years education can also include a number of specific characteristics, such as physical separation from the rest of the school, middle years teaching teams or sub-school groups, integrated and negotiated curriculum approaches, and authentic learning and assessment tasks (Hattam & Prosser, 2008).

It is evident that the middle years occupy a significant space in a school's structure, and one might pose questions as to why there is need for a middle years approach. There is research evidence to suggest that students in the middle years of their education have particular needs that are different from their younger or older peers (Carrington, 2003), and the middle school model emerged in order to cater for the unique needs of students at this time in their education. Previous reports have stated that students between the ages of 10 and 15 have strong connections with their peers, are seeking independence and a sense of their own identity, experience an array of heightened emotions, and are developing their abstract thinking and decision making skills (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004). Therefore, creating an environment that assists students through these experiences has been regarded as an important part of supporting young people's learning (Hanewald, 2013; MCEETYA, 2008).

Much of the debate about the difficulties of transition from primary to secondary school has focussed on the different structures between the two school systems. Primary education can generally be classified as more "child focused", with one teacher expected to deliver all the curriculum content to a class cohort of students, while secondary education is generally more "content specific" with different teachers specialising across the secondary school grades. Secondary schools, therefore, are usually larger and regarded by some as less personal (Burgess, Johnston, Key, Propper & Wilson, 2008; Moni & Hay, 2012). While it is true that many students progress without difficulty from primary to secondary school despite concerns about the disconnect between primary and secondary school education practices, there is research evidence to suggest that the middle years period can be a particularly challenging time for students (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). It has been reported that many students switch off from schooling, become disengaged and alienated, and, consequently, underachieve as the make their way through the middle school years (NSW

Department of Education and Training, 2004). The difficulties faced by young adolescent students in schooling is, in part, a reflection of difficulties many adolescents face in terms of their self-identify, establishing social relationships with peers and adults, and adapting to new challenges and expectations (Galton et al., 1999; Hawk & Hill, 2001). While early adolescence can present a number of challenges for many students, one of the biggest challenges adolescents face is coping with transition: the move from their familiar, nurturing primary school to the unfamiliar environment of secondary school (Burgess et al., 2008; Cox & Kennedy, 2008).

The Transition Phase

The topic of transition from primary to secondary school has become a complex issue in regards to education, and it has been an important topic of concern for educators and educational researchers on both a national and international level for some time (Atkin, 2001; Cox & Kennedy, 2008). Transition as an educational concept has been described as a critical and complex period, characterised by the influence of social and institutional factors which can result in either a positive or negative experience for young students (Galton et al., 1999; West & Schwerdt, 2012). Researchers investigating the transition phase have raised concerns about the way transition affects students on physical, emotional, psychological and academic levels (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Zeedyk et al., 2003). There is diversity in how different students respond to this transition, and in how the school systems prepares students for the transition phase. Dinham and Rowe (2008) suggested that not all young adolescents find the transition to secondary school problematic. Many students look forward to the upcoming change and regard the move as an exciting experience. Previous research has noted that students who experience a successful transition into secondary school are more likely to experience long-term, positive outcomes

(Resnick et al., 1997). However, researchers have also reported that for many adolescent students, the process of transition can be a very difficult experience (Ashton, 2008; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Coffey et al., 2011). Zeedyk et al. (2003) concluded that, even when students have a successful transition, the transition is almost always accompanied by feelings of stress and concern. Such research highlights the impact that transition can have upon adolescents' on an emotional and social level. To further enhance these previous understandings of the impact of transition upon students, a focus of this research was to determine whether the process of transition would also have adverse impacts for individuals in terms of academic achievement.

Defining transition.

Surprisingly, very few scholars who have examined transition offer explicit definitions of the term, placing more focus on the process of transition and the intrinsic impact it can have for the individual, rather than on what a transition phase actually is. For those who have offered a definition, there is some variance. Topping (2011) stated that transition is a process which typically occurs in three stages: between preschool and primary school, between primary school and secondary school, and secondary school and work. Galton et al. (1999) defined transition as the move from one school group to the next, and Hawk and Hill (2001) proposed transition to be the time when students move from primary school to secondary school. Offering a slightly different stance, Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) suggested that transition was a process of moving from the known to the unknown.

The transition phase can involve students physically moving from one school to another or it can involve students remaining in the same school and transitioning between grades. In the context of this research, the transition phase is defined as the internal or external move students make from their final year of primary school (Year 6) to their first

year of secondary school (Year 7). As defined above, internal transition (Towns, 2011) is the transition students make from primary school (Year 6) to secondary school (Year 7) by remaining on the same campus at the same school, and external transition (Towns, 2011) refers to the transition students make whereby they physically move from their primary school (Year 6) campus to a new secondary school (Year 7) campus.

General effects of transition.

The transition phase has been a topic of extensive exploration in educational research over the last thirty years. Numerous research studies have been conducted on the impact of transition on young adolescent students, and such investigations have concluded that the transition phase can have considerable negative, as well as positive, impacts upon students as they progress through school (Alspaugh, 1998; Coffey et al., 2011; Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Hanewald, 2013; Huggins & Knight, 1997; Migdley et al., 2000; Topping, 2011). According to the literature, transitioning from primary school to secondary school presents a number of challenges for adolescent students in a range of areas. For example, Moje (2008) argued that the transition phase was a time of considerable change, in which adolescents were experiencing a variety of physical, social and emotional challenges. Similarly, Cox and Kennedy (2008) stated that, for many adolescent students, transitioning is not only about acclimatising to a new and often larger physical environment, but also about adjusting to new ways of thinking, new teachers, new subjects, different school expectations, as well as interacting with a much larger number of peers. Previous research also identified that the transition phase can cause feelings of anxiety, distress and vulnerability for some students (Eccles & Wigfield, 1993; San Antonio, 2004). Extending from these findings, more recent research has revealed that many adolescents experience stress, low self-esteem, apathy,

decreased motivation and a decline in their attitudes towards school work and school life during transition (Coffey et al., 2011; Dinham & Rowe, 2008; Moje, 2008). Cox and Kennedy (2008) stated that the ability of students to cope with the transition phase is likely to have a significant impact on how they perceive and engage with school, and if they succeed socially, emotionally and academically throughout their secondary education.

How Does the Transition Impact an Individual?

As stated above, the primary to secondary transition is regarded as a major event in the lives of young adolescents and, as a result, there has been considerable interest in how, and to what extent, the transition phase impacts students. Such investigations have been relatively consistent, with the literature focusing on three key areas: social wellbeing, emotional/intrinsic wellbeing and academic achievement.

A number of researchers have investigated the impact of transition upon adolescents' social wellbeing (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Pratt & George, 2005; Thurston et al., 2010). Such research has concluded that transitioning to a new school can cause significant disruptions to students' social relationships. Moving to a new school not only means students have to develop new relationships with teachers, but many students will also be required to leave their primary school friends behind. This has been reported to have a particularly detrimental influence on young adolescents. At a time when friendships and peer groups are extremely important, the transition causes a disruption of such groups (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Missing old friends, having to make new friends or not being part of a group have been identified as large causes of stress and anxiety for many students (Topping, 2011). How well a student adjusts socially during the transition to secondary school can have a significant impact upon a student's emotional wellbeing (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

The research literature has also concluded that the transition phase can have a significant impact upon a student's emotional/intrinsic well-being. Transition can be a period of anxiety for many students and, during this time, it has been reported that many students experience declines in their self-esteem and self-concept (Sirsch, 2003). More dramatic impacts on students' emotional wellbeing have also been reported, which relate to the mental health of students (Topping, 2011). For some students, transition can bring a sense of loss and loneliness which may cause stress and even feelings of depression (Rudolph, Lambert, Clark & Kurlakowsky, 2001). The impact of transition on adolescent students can become particularly problematic, as declines in self-esteem and self-concept have been identified to influence students' academic achievement and students' social interactions in school (Mullins & Irvin, 2000).

There is also evidence in the transition literature which indicated that, as students transition from primary to secondary school, declines in academic achievement will be experienced (Topping, 2011). As outlined above, a student's social adjustment and emotional wellbeing during transition play a vital role in determining how well a student will cope in school, not only emotionally and socially, but also academically. As this constituted a major focus of this research, the academic achievement of students across the transition phase is discussed in detail below.

Student achievement across transition.

Academic transition has been defined in the research literature as "a process during which institutional and social factors influence which students' educational careers are positively or negatively affected by the transition phase" (Schiller, 1999, pp. 216-217). According to Hanewald (2013), changes in students' social relationships and the changing context of moving to secondary school can strongly affect students' academic outcomes.

There exists a body of research literature which suggests that many students experience declines in their academic achievement during the transition phase (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Alspaugh, 1998; Galton et al., 1999; Huggins & Knight, 1997; Nield, 2009; West & Schwerdt, 2012; Zeedyk et al., 2003), and there is literature suggesting that transition disrupts student learning which dates back over forty years ago. For example, in their Scotland based study, Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) investigated the effect transition (referred to by these researchers as transfer) had on students' academic progress. They concluded that certain groups of students, such as those who previously found school a challenge, had low motivation or came from low income backgrounds, were more likely to experience negative outcomes as they transitioned into secondary school.

Declines in pupils' progress during the transition phase were also reported by studies conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In an exploration of achievement loss associated with the transition to middle school, and from middle school to secondary school, Alsplaugh (1998) reported that students' achievement significantly declined across two transition points: from Year 5 to Year 6 and from Year 8 to Year 9 in the areas of reading, mathematics, science and social science. Galton et al. (1999) reviewed a number of transition studies and professional reports, and identified signs of a post-transition dip during secondary school, when students were in the early stages of Year 7. They found evidence that many students do not maintain their achievement levels from their primary years, with some students even dropping backwards in their level of achievement (Galton et al., 1999). Similar findings were also reported in research conducted by Migdley et al. (2000). These researchers examined students' grade point averages (GPA) as they transitioned from sixth through to ninth grade, and reported that GPA scores declined significantly each year they progressed through secondary school (Migdley et al., 2000). These findings were consistent with a study conducted by Reyes et al. (2000), who examined the long-term effects that transition related

perceptions had on students' final academic outcomes and found significant declines occurred in their GPAs from Year 8 to Year 9.

More recent transition literature investigating declines in students' academic achievement across the transition phase has revealed that transition continues to be an issue of concern in regards to students' social and emotional wellbeing and achievement (Hanewald, 2013). In response to the academic and professional literature identifying transition as an issue for some students, a major exploratory study was conducted in 2008 in New Zealand by the Research Division of the Ministry of Education. This study followed a group of 112 Year 8 students as they made the transition from Year 8 to Year 9 and Year 9 to Year 10. The main focus of the research was to examine student achievement in mathematics, reading and writing as they transitioned from primary to secondary school (Cox & Kennedy, 2008). Findings from this study revealed that, for the average student, achievement in reading and writing plateaued from Year 8 to Year 9, but declined in mathematics (Cox & Kennedy, 2008).

A recent study conducted in the United States by West and Schwerdt (2012) investigated whether transition had an effect on students' achievement as they transitioned into middle school (Year 6 or Year 7) and secondary school (Year 8 to Year 9). The researchers found that the process of transition caused a substantial drop in students' test scores the first year following transition for those students who transitioned from Year 6 (primary school) to Year 7 (secondary school). A small drop in achievement for students transitioning into secondary school from Year 8 to Year 9 was also found, with students experiencing declines in the areas of mathematics and reading, which equated to a loss of between 3.5 and 7 months of learning achievement (West & Schwerdt, 2012). They referred to this phenomena as the *middle school plunge.*

The evidence for such academic decline is quite alarming and suggests that there is still work to be done in order to address this issue. That is, further research is required to investigate why the transition from primary school to secondary school continues to present difficulties for some students. While previous research across a number of areas has been important for developing a broad understanding of the many ways transition can impact adolescent students, these issues were not the central focus in the present research. In order to add to the exisiting research surrounding students' transition to secondary school, this research focused on one key area that has received relatively little attention in either the middle school or the transition literature: the impact of transition upon adolescent students' literacy achievement. This focus was chosen in response to claims which suggested that literacy skills decline in early adolescent learners, as a result of moving from primary to secondary school (Du Toit & Bouwer, 2009).

What Causes Academic Decline During Transition?

Many researchers have sought to determine the 'cause' for the decline many students experience in their achievement across transition. While many ideas and conclusions have been proposed, the question of what causes the declines has not been specifically answered. West et al. (2010) stated "the question remains controversial, in large part because the evidence base remains inconsistent and incomplete" (p. 22). However, a review of the transition literature revealed a number of factors that have been found to contribute to the decline in students' achievement levels across the transition phase. These are summarised below.

Onset of adolescence.

The time at which transition occurs coincides with adolescent developmental changes (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009), and the age at which students make the transition varies from country to country (Cox & Kennedy, 2008). In Australia, transition typically occurs anywhere between the ages of 11 and 13, and in the USA and the UK, the age is slightly higher at 14 or 15 years old. The fact that many students are going through puberty during transition has been highlighted as a contributing factor to the impact transition can have on adolescent students. Research has stated that the changes that occur during puberty, such as social, emotional and cognitive development and the increased importance of friendship groups, are additional contributing factors to the anxiety and stress students experience during transition (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

There appears to be some agreement that the onset of adolescence is one of the main contributing factors to the difficulties many students experience during the transition phase into secondary school (Hawk & Hill, 2001; McGee et al, 2004; Nield, 2009; Reyes et al., 2000). It has been proposed that early adolescence brings about more changes than any other developmental period, due to the hormonal and physical factors associated with puberty (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). During the onset of adolescence, students' cognitive abilities develop, they grow in their ability to think abstractly and hypothetically, peer acceptance and the establishment of friendship groups become very important, and they begin the search for independence and a greater sense of autonomy. In addition, it has been reported that students' intrinsic motivation, academic self-concept and interest in school and grades decline (West et al., 2010).

Studies have investigated the relationship between the changing developmental needs of early adolescents and their progress through school. An American study conducted by Whitlock (2004) concluded that one third of adolescent students become disengaged when

they enter secondary school, and experience feelings of disaffection and a lack of emotional support. Canadian researchers De Wit, Karioja and Rye (2010) proposed a "stage environment fit theory" (p. 452) which suggested that there is a lack of fit between the developmental needs of adolescents and the demands of schooling, on both social and emotional levels. According to these researchers, if students are not provided with the appropriate social and emotional support at this particular stage in their education, a time when they are seeking support from teachers and fellow peers, they are likely to disengage from school and, in many instances, experience academic difficulties. A similar theoretical model developed a number of years earlier, the participation-identification model (Finn, 1989), proposed that if adolescent students are not able to develop strong feelings of identification with their school environment they are more likely to withdraw from school, with such withdrawal leading to declines in achievement and even school drop-out.

Similarly, Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) argued that secondary school organisational structures and practices, particularly during the students' transition phase, may negatively affect the coping ability of young adolescents. These researchers noted that there was a lack of fit between the needs of adolescents and the school environment. At a time when students are searching for autonomy, schools reduce the opportunity for student input and decision making. While students are beginning to develop their higher level thinking skills, it has been reported that lower secondary school teachers tended to use low level thinking and student engagement strategies with their students (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008). Eccles and Wigfield (1993) suggested that the secondary school structure disrupts social relationships at a time when students are most searching for social acceptance and belonging. According to Topping (2011), the structure of the secondary school environment also reduces opportunities for student decision making, due to the inflexible delivery of content and the didactic approach to teaching.

In addition to the academic literature, a number of policy documents have highlighted the adolescent years as a period that requires specific tailoring to the needs of students. *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008) stated that adolescence occurs at a time when knowledge of fundamental disciplines is beginning to develop.

> Student motivation and engagement in these years is critical and can be influenced by tailoring approaches to teaching … that specifically consider the needs of middle Years students. … Effective transitions between primary and secondary schools are an important aspect of ensuring student engagement … [and] provide programs that are responsive to students' developmental needs in the middle years. (p. 12)

Similarly, the *Middle Phase of Schooling State School Action Plan* (2004) from Queensland suggested that young adolescent learners have significantly different needs to students in the lower or higher stages of school based education, and that these needs should be catered for through different teaching methods and approaches. The report proposed that, in order to address the needs of adolescent students, accountability for the middle years of learning needed to be made by embedding it more into the school planning and curriculum frameworks. The report went on to suggest that this could be achieved by improving the continuity of curriculum and pedagogy across the primary and secondary years. Improving and connecting the curriculum to promote deeper understanding and higher levels of engagement for students, and providing teacher support were also recognised as important issues that helped to promote student achievement (Education Queensland, 2004).

A NSW report titled *Excellence and Innovation* (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004) also suggested that students aged between 10 and 15 have particular needs that are different to younger or older students. The report suggested that adolescent students during the period of transition experienced strong emotions, were seeking greater

independence, were advancing intellectually in their thinking, and developing their skills in abstract thinking and problem-solving. In addition, it was also proposed that during the school Years 5 to 8, students also became more disengaged with school, experienced greater feelings of alienation from parents, and often experienced a decline in their academic achievement. A number of recommendations were put forward in the NSW report that aimed to help support students as they progressed through middle school education. These included developing a range of social relationship programs to help students, as well as designing additional support materials to assist teachers to teach across the curriculum in Year 7. The report also advocated for the need to individualise and personalise the students program of study, and demonstrate greater transferring of school based information about students from primary to secondary school to enable more continuity of programs (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004).

Due to the many changes that accompany young adolescents, middle schooling advocates in Australia and internationally have proposed that adolescent learners need specific support in order to cater for their developmental needs (Prosser, 2008; Topping, 2011). While the attention given to the middle years and adolescent learning were considered to be a positive step for education, it has been argued that such studies may incorrectly portray all adolescents as disaffected from education (Carrington, 2006; McGee et al., 2004). In their review of the transition literature, McGee et al., (2004) noted that the transition from primary to secondary school does produce mixed outcomes for different cohorts of students, but the evidence is that the transition to secondary school is often associated with a drop in academic achievement regardless of the age at which transition takes place. This indicates that the transition is a particularly challenging process for a student to undertake and the adverse effects that some students experience in regards to academic achievement cannot be soley attributed to a students' age or developmental level. Therefore, it is important that the

causes for students' academic declines are investigated and addressed to minimise the impact on students' academic achievement. Due to the continued reports of students' decline across transition, there is a continued need for research into this area, and the present research will contribute to this area of the research field.

Social adjustment.

Students' transitions into secondary schooling occur at a time when friendship groups are becoming increasingly important; however, the process of transition often serves to disrupt previous social and peer relationships (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Zeedyk et al., 2003). This can lead to social anxiety and stress for some students (McGee et al., 2004). Relationships with the one core teacher are also disrupted when primary school students move to a new secondary school, and it has been reported that teacher/student relationships decline at the secondary level (De Wit et al., 2010; McGee et al., 2004). It has been proposed that students who do not receive adequate social support during transition into secondary education are at risk of declines in their academic achievement and higher levels of disaffection from school (De Wit et al., 2010), anxiety and loneliness (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000).

Students' perceptions of secondary school.

Although students' perceptions of transition have been explored in a number of research studies and occupy a large space in the transition literature (Akos & Galassi, 2004; De Wit et al., 2010; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Newman & Blackburn, 2002; West et al., 2010; Zeedyk et al., 2003), there have been mixed research findings about the way students view the process of transition. Research has found that students who have positive perceptions of transition and viewed transition as an exciting process were more likely to have positive academic outcomes post-transition. In comparison, students who viewed the

transition as a negative experience, a period of challenge and despair, have reported to be more likely to find the academic demands of secondary school difficult, and experience declines in motivation and declines in their enjoyment of school (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; McGee et al., 2004).

Socioeconomic status/cultural factors/family support.

The impact of cultural factors, SES and family life on student achievement has been well documented in the literature, with a general consensus that students who come from different cultural backgrounds, or who come from low SES areas, are most at risk of academic decline or failure during the transition phase (West et al., 2010). Family support has also been reported to be linked to achievement, with research suggesting that effective and supportive parents, who are knowledgeable about education, lead to better adjustment in school (McGee et al., 2004, Topping, 2011).

Organisational issues.

The organisational differences between primary and secondary schools have also been identified as a cause for student difficulty during transition. Research evidence suggests that primary and secondary schools are organised in vastly different ways (Hawk & Hill, 2001). Traditionally, primary schools are smaller and more personalised learning environments than secondary schools (West et al., 2010). Students generally work with one teacher in one classroom for the entire day in a flexible, group oriented and integrated learning environment where individual needs can be catered for and are readily addressed (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). The structure of the secondary school, however, is reported to be quite different. The flexible learning environments prominent in the primary settings are replaced by routines,

timetables and individualised approaches to learning. Integration is replaced by subject specialisation and students may be taught a number of subjects by a number of teachers in a single day, affecting the opportunity for students to build student/teacher and peer relationships (Hawk & Hill, 2001). While moving to a new school invariably involves some form or organisational adjustment in terms of structure, time and routine, it has been reported that the difficulties students have making such adjustment is temporary (Hanewald, 2013; Howe, 2011).

Linkages between schools.

Another reason attributed to the decline in student achievement across transition is insufficient linkage arrangements between primary and secondary schools. Although it has been noted that some schools have linking arrangements in place involving student transition programs, the transfer of student information, student orientation days and cross school teacher contacts, many of these initiatives do not adequately cater for the ongoing learning needs of individual students who transition between schools (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998).

Curriculum and pedagogy.

Issues of curriculum and pedagogy have also been attributed as significant causes for student difficulty across transition. For many students, transition becomes difficult as there is a shift from a child-centred, activity-based or experiential classroom, to a more individualised and didactic approach, informed by a different pedagogical ideology (Prosser, 2008). Problems have also been reported in terms of secondary teachers favouring a “fresh start” approach that ignores information passed on by feeder schools, a discontinuity of curriculum content and a failure to build on the knowledge students have already established in their primary years (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Primary teachers have also been found to

provide insufficient or inaccurate information to secondary teachers in regards to upcoming students (McGee et al., 2004).

Teachers.

Hattie (2003) proposed that, apart from the students themselves, it is the teacher who has the most significant impact upon the academic achievement and development of children and young adolescents. The literature supports this claim and suggests that teachers play an important role in a student's transition experience, as they are in a central position for providing the social and academic support students needed in order to transition successfully (Migdley et al., 2000). The support teachers give to students is a crucial element for quality learning environments as they progress through school, and it has been reported that students who feel supported by their teachers have increased motivation towards school as well as positive feelings of social and emotional wellbeing (Hanewald, 2013). The perceptions of teachers and the types of methods they use in their classrooms to facilitate effective transition for students can provide valuable information about how to support students from one year to the next. However, although the role of teachers has been recognised, there is a limited amount of research evidence on teachers' perceptions of how to best support students during the transition phase (Topping, 2011).

The literature, which focused on the views and voices of teachers, revealed similar findings. Akos and Galassi (2004) compared the perceptions of students, parents and teachers involved in middle and secondary school transitions, and found that teachers' perceptions of the transition phase varied. Such findings suggested that primary level teachers believed that the social and procedural challenges of transition were important to address rather than the academic issues, whereas teachers at the secondary school level were more aware of the academic concerns transition presented for students. In another study investigating teachers'

suggestions for easing the transition, Zeedyk et al. (2003) found that many teachers believed that some form of action needed to be taken by schools to ease the transition for students, rather than focusing purely on the structural and social aspects of transition. These researchers also reported a number of suggestions made by teachers to ease the transition, including increasing school visits, providing mentoring, actively involving parents, and offering counselling (Zeedyk et al., 2003).

Due to the lack of research surrounding teachers' perceptions of the transition phase and teacher's practices during this phase, teachers' perceptions of transition and teacher practice became a central focus in the present study, in order to further develop understandings of the role teachers play in transition and how they can support students through the transition phase.

Literacy and Transition

As the review of literature above demonstrates, there is considerable evidence to suggest the transition phase can have a negative impact upon students' general academic achievement. Although research in the area is more limited, there is also some literature to suggest that students' achievement on test scores in specific content areas decline from primary to secondary school (Alspaugh, 1998; Rice, 2001). The present research aimed to further explore and contribute to such research through an exploration of the impact of transition upon adolescent students' literacy achievement. While this research acknowledges the multifaceted approach to literacy, this research focused on two key areas essential for the development of literacy skills in young adolescent learners: reading and spelling (Maughan, Collishaw, Pickles, Snowling, & Yule 2009; Department of Education, 2011-2012).

Previous research focussing on the adolescent years has emphasised the need for attention to be paid to the area of adolescent literacy achievement (Galton et al., 1999; McGee et al., 2004). Past studies have found that, as adolescents progress through school, the range of student literacy achievement widens and, for some students, progress slows or even stalls. Numerous reports have emerged from government departments and research studies that demonstrate a growing concern for the declining literacy achievement of many adolescent students, particularly as they transition from primary to secondary school (see Culican, 2005; Cumming 1996; Cormack, 1996; Barratt, 1998, Education Queensland, 2004). Such research calls for the need to increase understandings of the reasons for the declines many adolescents experience in their literacy achievement.

The development of adequate literacy skills in the adolescent years is recognised as a complex process. While the beginning of secondary school should be a time of growing independence and academic skill in the area of literacy, it is becoming increasingly common that, for many students, the inverse is true (Dinham & Rowe, 2008). Despite the growing need for improvements in literacy skills from policy reports, government recommendations and research literature, such reports indicate that many students fail to acquire basic literacy skills by the time they leave primary school (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004). According to Luke, Comber and Grant (2003), to be literate in today's world, students must be able to engage with a range of forms of literacy, including those that are required to decode print, visual and digital media. To be considered literate, an individual must be able to engage with multiple types of texts, in a variety of contexts and be able to actively communicate, using media to gain information and process that information to communicate with others (Luke & Freebody, 2003). Therefore, ensuring adolescents are prepared adequately for the demands of secondary school literacy is of great importance, as students who enter the transition phase without the necessary skills will find the demands of secondary school quite challenging.

Explorations of adolescent literacy achievement have claimed that secondary school students' literacy levels are in decline and that many secondary school students fail to acquire adequate literacy skills to successfully participate in the workforce (Dugdale & Clark, 2008; Benner, 2011). While there is debate about the accuracy of such claims (Freebody, 2007; Lingard, 2011; Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004), the constant reports of concerns from teachers, parents and government departments regarding student literacy capabilities indicate that adolescent literacy achievement continues to be an area which needs to be addressed and further investigated (Hanewald, 2013).

Literacy in Upper Primary and Lower Secondary

The literacy achievement of adolescents has occupied government and policy reports in Australia for some time, such as *The Middle Years of Schooling (Years 6 to 10): A Discussion Paper* (National Board of Employment, Education & Training, 1992), and *From Alienation to Engagement* (Cumming, 1996; Cormack, 1996). These reports have identified key issues and proposed recommendations and strategies to improve student engagement, literacy achievement and wellbeing. There has also been an increased focus on improving the learning outcomes of those students who are at risk of underachievement in literacy across the transition phase (Culican, 2005).

Whilst it is important to recognise that not all adolescents are struggling in the area of literacy, there is evidence to suggest that many adolescent students are working below the expected level in literacy, particularly in the areas of reading and writing (Goiran-Bevelhimer, 2008). Previous research suggests that the number of students achieving grade level prior to secondary school decreases as they progress through the secondary school years, with early literacy gains decreasing by the time they reach their eighth year of school (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Developing understandings of the reasons for such literacy declines and

difficulties across transition is vital, particularly for those students who are already achieving below the expected level in literacy.

In an exploration of literacies and multiliteracies in the middle years, Maclean (2005) stated:

> The middle years are also a problematic time for literacy learning. Achievement in literacy for many tends to plateau or go backwards, and the gap between good and poor readers grows ever wider. Many learners disengage from literacy, and do not read and write even if they are able to. The reasons for these problems are varied. Some students who read successfully in the early years are unable to cope with the increased demands of middle years literacy. … The reading and writing tasks typically encountered in secondary classrooms are more fragmented and less interesting than in upper primary school. … Many lessons do not have a purpose which is clear to either the students or the teacher, and have no connection to students' backgrounds or interests. There is a lack of intellectual depth, challenge and rigour, and a lack of the focused teaching of skills and strategies which students need to complete the tasks set for them. (p. 104)

The statement above highlights key areas for concern during the transition phase, and identifies the need for further exploration into this phase of education. While there is debate about the accuracy of statements which suggest that adolescent students' literacy learning is in decline (Freebody, 2007; Lingard, 2011) and that not all primary and secondary classrooms are characteristic of the points Maclean (2005) identifies, Maclean's argument has been supported in the literature. Researchers have concluded that the middle years present challenges for students in regards to their literacy learning (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Cauley & Jovanovic; Pervin, 2005) and that reading is a particular area of concern, with students

becoming disengaged from the reading process when they enter secondary school (Dinham & Rowe, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

In 2005, the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) released a report entitled *Teaching Reading: National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy* (DEST, 2005). In this report, a summary of Australia's literacy performance was provided. It was highlighted that, while many Australian adolescent students perform better in assessments of literacy than students from other countries, 12% to 28% of adolescent students fail to develop the necessary literacy skills required for further education, training and work. The report also found that 20% of Australians between the ages of 15 to 74 have very poor literacy skills, and a further 28% will experience difficulties later in life on literacy related tasks (DEST, 2005).

In their exploration of effective transition programs for students entering middle or secondary school, Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) reported that, in the United States, 38% of students perform less well on literacy tasks after they have undergone the process of transition. The researchers reported that more students fail the post transition year into secondary school than any other grade in school, and that low SES and minority groups are twice as likely as others to fail or be retained. These researchers also found that, for students who struggle with basic literacy (and numeracy) skills, 20% will leave schools before completing secondary school (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Further exploration of the reasons for students' literacy decline and disengagement across transition is therefore needed and warrants the direction of the present research.

Reading and Transition

Reading is a developmental practice and, just as students are undergoing developmental changes during the transition phase, so too are they experiencing a change in

their reading capabilities. In the primary years, students learn the basics of reading and therefore, when students progress into secondary school, it is often assumed that they will have a solid grasp of these basic skills. However, it is now known that reading skills develop differently for different individuals: some students are slower than others, and many do not develop adequate reading skills by the time they complete primary education (Dinham & Rowe, 2008). For those students who have not yet mastered the necessary reading skills, doing so becomes problematic and, as a result, these students fail to adequately progress to more advanced reading levels.

In 2003, a US report *Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006) revealed that up to 70% of adolescent students have difficulties reading and, as a result, need some form of literacy remediation during their education. It was proposed that the difficulties for these students was not that they need help reading from the page, but that they are not able to comprehend what they read (Biancarosa, & Snow, 2006). The report highlighted this as one of the significant problems surrounding adolescent readers and may explain why so many adolescents struggle on secondary school reading tasks. It is generally assumed that once a student reaches the end of their primary school education they have learnt to read and, therefore, when they enter secondary school they will have the necessary skills to "read to learn" (Pervin, 2005, p. 39). Pervin (2005) also proposed that if a student has not learnt to read by the age of 12, then learning in all other subjects becomes particularly problematic, as reading is a skill required across all areas of the curriculum.

Snow and Biancarosa (2003) stated that the act of reading is complex and should be referred to as "learning to read to learn" (p. 5). When students progress into secondary school, content demands increase and they are expected to read texts across a range of disciplines with skill, understanding and the ability to comprehend meaning. Chall and Jacobs (2003)

state that “in order to read, understand, and learn from these more demanding texts, the reader must be fluent in recognising words, and their vocabulary and knowledge need to expand, as does their ability to think critically and broadly” (p. 14). In addition to these skills, adolescent readers must also have the motivation to read and to learn, sufficient comprehension strategies, and the ability to read for a purpose and from a wide variety of texts. For adolescents who come from disadvantaged groups or who find reading difficult, engaging in secondary school reading practices can be a particular struggle (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008).

Students’ Reading Achievement and Transition

The literature on adolescents and their reading achievement is expansive; however, the relationship between adolescent reading achievement and transition has not been studied comprehensively (Du Toit & Bouwer, 2009). In the literature which explored this relationship, a consistent pattern emerged suggesting that, as students transition into secondary school, many experience declines in their reading achievement, particularly those who are reading below the expected grade level (Alspaugh, 1998; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Nield, 2009; West & Schwerdt, 2012). Studies have shown that many students perform less well in reading after they have undergone the process of transition (Mizelle, 2005; Pervin, 2005) and that many students will experience a dip in their reading progress (Alspaugh, 1998; Galton et al., 1999).

In a study conducted in New Zealand, Cox and Kennedy (2008) tracked the reading and writing achievement of low, average and high achievers as they transitioned into secondary school. The researchers found that students who were underachieving in reading and writing continued to do so as they progressed through school. Additionally, students who were achieving at the expected grade level also demonstrated a decline in their reading and writing achievement. These findings suggest that the transition phase has the greatest impact

on those students who were already achieving below the expected levels in literacy prior to transition, but that regardless of academic capability, reading and writing achievement declined (Cox & Kennedy, 2008).

Nield (2009) also explored the primary to secondary transition with a particular focus on why students fall “off track” (p. 53) during the transition phase. From a summary of state reports, national surveys and national data, Nield (2009) identified that, during transition, students with poor reading skills of two or more years below grade level were overwhelmed by the academic demands of secondary school and were 25% more likely to underachieve than students who were reading at the satisfactory grade level. Nield’s (2009) work also identified that below average readers were 50% more likely to fail or drop out of secondary school early. Nield (2009) attributed the academic difficulty across the transition phase to four causes: life course changes, disruptions to teacher and student relationships, inadequate preparation for secondary school and the organisation of the secondary school climate.

For some adolescent students, enthusiasm and motivation for learning decreases as they transition from primary to secondary school. This is particularly true for reading (Moje, 2008). Research has proposed that adolescents become apathetic and reluctant and many develop feelings of resistance and negativity towards the process of reading during this period (Du Toit & Bouwer, 2009). Du Toit and Bouwer (2009) also suggested that secondary schools offer little opportunity for students to read for pleasure due to pressures to cover specific classroom content and curriculum deadlines. In addition, secondary teaching places a focus on individual rather than collaborative learning. However, many secondary teachers do not differentiate to address the individual needs of every adolescent reader and, as a result, academic achievement may suffer with less attention given to individual progress (Du Toit & Bouwer, 2009). The success of transitioning depends on the various factors discussed

previously, that are interconnected (San Antonio, 2004) and which influence not only the emotional, but also the cognitive development of adolescent learners.

Students' Spelling Achievement and Transition

Spelling was used as a second measure in addition to reading in order to obtain a measure of students' spelling and writing ability during the transition phase. Spelling was also included as a second measure of literacy, rather than just relying on students' attainment in reading and comprehension. Research reveals there is a strong correlation between spelling, writing and reading ability and therefore it was appropriate to include spelling as a measure in this research in order to gain a more holistic view of students' literacy capabilities over the transition phase (Dinham & Rowe, 2008). Spelling is also a stable measure over time.

The literature suggested that students who experience reading difficulties also demonstrate impairments in their spelling skills, with poor readers continuing to show deficits in their spelling capabilities throughout adulthood (Maughan et al., 2009; Du Toit & Bouwer, 2009). The majority of the literature surrounding adolescents' spelling achievement focussed on adolescents with disabilities or dyslexia. There is therefore limited research on adolescent spelling achievement, and even less on the impact of transition on adolescent student spelling achievement.

Having strong literacy skills has often been referred to as the key to educational success and, as a result, students who are slow to acquire reading and spelling skills may be vulnerable to underachievement through school and beyond (Maughan et al., 2009). Studies have shown that the cognitive difficulties that contribute to reading difficulties continue to persist throughout a student's education and that those students who are poor readers will also show impairments in their spelling skills, with little chance of catching up (Snowling & Muter, 2011).

The impact of transition on students' spelling achievement was investigated by one researcher twenty years ago (Fouracre, 1993). In this particular study, the spelling achievement of students was explored as part of a larger case study. The research examined pupils' expectations of the transition phase using a variety of tests, questionnaires, essays and group discussions. The study reported a mismatch between pupils' perceptions of progress after transition and their actual progress. In addition, it was found that on tests of basic skills, such as spelling and punctuation, students showed a drop in spelling progress (Fouracre, 1993). The decline was attributed to academic discontinuity between the primary and secondary school systems.

Past research also found that students who experience difficulties in spelling in their primary and secondary years continue to experience difficulties throughout their adult years, leading to functional impairments in everyday life. A study conducted by Maughan et al. (2009) reported that individuals who were identified as poor spellers when they were in school failed to improve in terms of their spelling capabilities and, even after three decades, continued to demonstrate major impairments in their spelling skills. Previous researchers also proposed that by adolescence, individual differences in spelling and related sub-skills become stable and as a result, adolescents who have literacy problems will continue to experience difficulties in spelling, as well as reading, impacting their ability to complete everyday tasks and perform functional tasks adequately (Maughan et al., 2009).

Research Rationale

It is widely accepted in most western societies that possessing strong literacy skills is the key to educational success. As a result, students who are slow to develop reading and spelling skills are particularly vulnerable to underachievement and dissatisfaction from

school. Heller and Greenleaf (2007) argued that, for students to be truly prepared for the future, in terms of future education, work and general citizenship, they "cannot settle for a modest level of proficiency" in literacy skills, but will need to "develop the advanced literacy skills that are required in order to master the academic content areas" (p. 1). It is the academic content areas which constitute much of secondary schooling and therefore ensuring students have the necessary skills to engage with content area instruction is an essential aspect of high quality teaching and learning. It has further been proposed that the stronger an individual's literacy skills are, the more likely they will be to gain full time employment, participate as an active member of the community and contribute to their child's success at school (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007).

Due to the importance literacy has in the world and its influence amongst many facets of society (Dugdale & Clark, 2008), it is vital that educators work towards improving and sustaining acceptable levels of student achievement in literacy. Despite the growing need for literacy skills, research has suggested, "adolescents today read no better, and perhaps marginally worse, than a generation ago" (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, p. 3). According to Shanahan and Shanahan (2008), many secondary school students were working below the expected levels in literacy, particularly in reading, where an increasing amount of students were reading and writing below the basic level. Indeed, research indicated that the number of students on track for secondary school literacy work decreased as students progressed through secondary school (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). In order to prevent students from being left behind as they take an important step in their educational career, it is vital that an understanding of the reasons for an academic achievement decline in the adolescent years are made, with particular emphasis on understanding why those students who are underachieving in primary school literacy continue to do so in secondary school. As well as this, an investigation into how educators can improve the transition phase for students in order to

decrease the achievement drop in literacy is vital and therefore forms the focus of this research.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The previous chapter explored and summarised the academic literature related to the topic of the transition phase and adolescent students' literacy achievement. The review highlighted that, while there has been a considerable amount of research around these topics, the relationship between adolescent students' literacy achievement and the transition phase has not been examined extensively and that gaps exist in this research field. A number of areas for further investigation were identified, some of which constituted the direction of the present research.

This chapter presents a discussion of the methodological approaches adopted for the research investigation. The chapter has been divided into six sections to enable a description of each part of the research process. The first section, Research Approach, provides a brief description of the methodological design adopted for the study. Section two, Developmental Phase, provides a description of the development of the research process, including ethical clearance, the selection of school sites, the participating schools and obtainment of participant consent. The third section, Participants, describes the participants chosen for the research, and in section four, Instruments, the research instruments used to generate data are explained. Section five, Procedure (Data Collection), outlines the methods of data collection through a three phase process and introduces the forms of data collected: student *PAT-R* and *SWST* scores and teacher interview responses. The final section, Data Analysis, outlines the steps used to analyse the data.

Research Approach

A mixed methodological approach was chosen for this research, which was a semi-longitudinal study drawing upon both the quantitative and qualitative paradigms. As Silverman (2005) noted, a methodology is defined by the choices researchers make about the cases they wish to explore. It involves ideas about how best to gather data, how best to analyse data and how to plan and execute a research study. A methodology is, therefore, the process for how researchers will go about studying any occurrence or observable event. While particular research methods are crucial for developing such understandings, different methods and research approaches are often needed to answer different kinds of research questions.

A mixed methods approach was suitable for this research, which was multifaceted and aimed to explore the transition phase through the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. According to Cresswell (2008), when qualitative and quatitative data are combined, a better understanding of the research problem can be gained. This was particularly true for this research, whereby the qualitative data was used to enhance the quantitative findings and enable more detailed information to be gained into the transition phase. Using a mixed methods research design offered 'the best of both worlds'to this research, as the approach enabled the research questions to be tackled from different angles, drawing on in-depth and contextualised insights associated with qualitative research and the predictive power of quantitative research. The mixed methods approach is also more comprehensive than using a single method, allowing for different types of data to be blended and cross disciplinary boundaries to be explored (Cresswell, 2012).

The quantitative component used as part of this study, utilising the *PAT-R* and the *SWST*, enabled an investigation to be carried out to best determine the impact that the transition from primary school to secondary school had upon students' reading and spelling

achievement. The approach also provided opportunity for other variables, such as type of transition and SES, to be explored. The qualitative component of the mixed methods approach enabled an exploration of teachers' perceptions of the transition phase, as well as an enriched insight into the types of literacy practices and programs they were using in their classrooms. This was achieved through thematic analysis of the qualitative data, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Developmental Phase of the Research

Ethics approval.

In order to commence the research, ethical approval was sought and obtained from relevant authorities. First, approval from the Faculty of Education Ethics Board and the Human Research Ethics Committee within the University of Tasmania was applied for, and later granted, with the approval number H0011489. As the participants for the investigation were teachers and students from government schools, ethical approval was also sought from the Tasmanian Department of Education, and granted with approval number 1267970. Documentation for the approval of the research is attached as Appendix A.

Participant consent: Information letters and consent forms.

Consent was required at a number of levels to enable the research process to begin. Upon ethical consent from relevant authorities, consent was also sought from the principals of each participating school and from the participating teachers within these schools. Information letters and consent forms were sent via post and email to the principals of each participating school. All information sheets contained full and accurate information about the purpose of the study, the number of participants required, the interview process, the assurance

of confidentiality, and some further information about the benefits of the study for the wider community. Ten principals agreed to the research being conducted in their schools and 19 teachers agreed to take part in the interview process. The signed consent forms were returned to the researcher via post. Examples of information letters and consent forms are included in Appendix B.

Privacy and confidentiality.

This research provided safeguards to protect the identities of all the participants, as well as the schools involved in the study. As the semi-longitudinal study tracked the achievement of students across a two-year period, it was a requirement that students could be re-identified in the second year of data collection. To fulfil this requirement and ensure student confidentiality, each student was given a personal identification number (which was known only by the researcher). To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the teacher participants, each teacher was similarly provided with an individual alpha-numeric code (for example, T61b) and no individual teacher's name was used throughout the transcription or data analysis process. Further, each participating school was non-identifiable, as alpha-numeric codes replaced the names of the individual schools (for example, School 1b). Data from this research is stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Tasmania for five years and will be destroyed at the completion of the five year period.

Protection from harm.

The research involved student participants completing two standardised literacy tests on two separate occasions. The research also required teacher participants to take part in an interview with the researcher. Participation in the research was voluntary and schools or

individual participants were free to withdraw at any time. The rights of the schools and participants were clearly outlined in writing in the information sheets (see Appendix B).

Consequences of participation and non-participation.

Participation in the study was voluntary and strictly confidential. Schools, teachers and students were advised through the information sheets that if, at any time, they chose not to participate or decided to withdraw, their decision would be respected without question or consequence.

Selection of schools.

Following ethics approval from the necessary departments, the research sites were selected and approached by the researcher. Due to the number of educational facilities in the state, it was essential that some distinction was made in regards to which schools would be most suitable for the purpose of this research. A number of particular school attributes were desired for the study and initial criteria were established in order to narrow the selection of the schools that would become the sites of focus for the investigation. In line with the central aims of this research and the research questions, the following criteria were established to ensure a representative sample of schools was obtained to best meet the needs of the research:

Geographical location.

Representativeness of the transitional experiences of students in Tasmania required the participating schools to be drawn from various geographical locations within the state and, therefore, the location of the school played an important part in the selection process. The schools chosen for the study varied in their location from the south, south-east, north, north-

west and the east of Tasmania. The participating schools came from both urban and rural areas.

Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA).

The second criterion was to ensure the participating schools were representative in terms of the Australian Government's ICSEA. This is a Commonwealth Government developed home and community SES measure of socio-educational advantage. Compared to other states in Australia, Tasmania is a small state, and also a very regional and rural state, that proportionally has more schools identified in the low ICSEA band and very few high ISCEA schools (Hay et al., 2011). The ICSEA scale classifies schools by level of home social and economic capital: low ICSEA (greater level of home disadvantage, low SES), middle ISCEA (moderate levels of home disadvantage, average SES) and high ISCEA (low levels of disadvantage, high SES). Schools that have a low ICSEA score are generally categorised by parents with economic or educational disadvantage, such as those students from families on welfare or unemployment benefits. High ICSEA schools are generally categorised by parents in employment with high educational qualifications. Participating schools were chosen from low, middle and high ICSEA bands.

School type.

Three types of government schools were included in the investigation: kindergarten to Year 6 primary schools, Year 7 to Year 10 secondary schools, and kindergarten to Year 10 district schools. School type was an important variable towards enabling a comparison to be made between students transitioning externally and those transitioning internally. District schools are more common in rural locations in Tasmania and, as they are the only school in a rural district, they are called district schools rather than primary or secondary schools.

For district school students, the transition is internal and usually involves moving to a different building on the same campus with the same cohort of students that attended their primary years at the primary section of the school. In these district schools, many of the students would already know many of the secondary school teachers because secondary school teachers often had opportunities to interact with the students in the primary years. In some of these schools, the primary and the secondary school teachers often shared common staff rooms. This is a different experience to those students who moved from a primary school at the end of Year 6 to a new and local secondary school at the beginning of Year 7. Such local secondary schools typically draw students from a number of feeder primary schools. External transitions such as these are the most common form of transition, particularly in larger regions across the state of Tasmania.

Twelve schools that satisfied the desired criteria were initially selected for the study. However, with the withdrawal of one primary school and one secondary school, the total number of schools consenting to participate was 10. Of these schools, four were Kindergarten to Year 6 primary schools, three were Year 7 to Year 10 secondary schools, and three were Kindergarten to Year 10 district schools.

Description of schools.

To ensure the confidentiality of each participating school, each school was given a number (1 to 7), which replaced the name of each school. Kindergarten to Year 6, and Year 7 to Year 10 secondary schools were also attributed a letter, where “a” represented a primary school and “b” represented the feeder secondary school. It was not necessary to attribute a letter to the district schools, as students remained on the same campus during transition. Below is a description of the participating schools:

School 1a: a kindergarten to Year 6 school located in a metropolitan area in southern Tasmania. The school was in the upper third ICSEA ranking, with an ICSEA score of 1013. School 1a had an enrolment of 541 students, with 24% of these students achieving in the top quarter for literacy and numeracy and 27% achieving in the bottom quarter. Unfortunately, this school declined the interview invitation and, as a result, the researcher was not able to interview the teachers at this school.

School 1b: a Year 7 to Year 10 secondary school located in a metropolitan area in southern Tasmania with an upper third ICSEA score of 967. The enrolment was 450, with 13% of students achieving in the top quarter and 33% achieving in the bottom quarter. The school was a direct feeder school for School 1a, though the school attracted students from a number of surrounding areas. Students from School 4 transitioned to this school.

School 2: a kindergarten to Year 10 district school in northern Tasmania. The school was in the upper third ICSEA ranking with a score of 918. The school's enrolment size was 462, with 11% of students achieving in the top quarter and 59% achieving in the bottom quarter.

School 3a: a kindergarten to Year 6 school located in a small town in the south-east of Tasmania. School 3a had a diverse population of students, with an enrolment number of 274. The school was in the lower third ICSEA ranking, with a score of 891 with 0% of the students achieving in the top quarter for literacy and numeracy and 70% achieving in the bottom quarter.

School 3b: a Year 7 to Year 10 secondary school with a current enrolment of 355 students. School 3b was the direct feeder school for School 3a, though there was also an intake of

pupils from other surrounding areas. Located approximately five minutes from the primary school, this school had a low ICSEA score of 896, with no students achieving in the top quarter and 72% in the bottom quarter for literacy and numeracy.

School 4: a kindergarten to Year 6 school located in a metropolitan area in southern Tasmania. The school was situated in the lower third ICSEA ranking with a score of 857. School 4a had an enrolment size of 239 students, with 1% of students achieving in the top quarter for literacy and numeracy and 73% achieving in the bottom quarter.

School 5a: a kindergarten to Year 6 school located in the north-west of Tasmania. The school had an ICSEA score of 876. The school population was 251, with 3% of students achieving in the top quarter for literacy and numeracy and 50% achieving in the bottom quarter. Unfortunately, this school declined the interview invitation and, as a result, the researcher was not able to interview the teachers at this school.

School 5b: a Year 7 to Year 10 secondary school. This school was the direct feeder school for School 5a. Also located in the north-west of the state, School 5b had an ICSEA score of 877, with a lower third ICSEA ranking. The school had an enrolment of 312 students, with 3% of students achieving in the top quarter for literacy and numeracy and 78% achieving in the bottom quarter.

School 6: a kindergarten to Year 10 district school situated in a metropolitan area in southern Tasmania. Located in the middle ICSEA ranking with an ICSEA score of 918, this school had an enrolment of 774 students, with 3% of students achieving in the top quarter and 59% achieving in the bottom for literacy and numeracy.

School 7: a kindergarten to Year 10 district school located on the north-east coast of Tasmania. It had a middle ICSEA ranking with a score of 943. There were 554 students enrolled in the school, with 5% of students achieving in the top quarter and 43% achieving in the bottom quarter for literacy and numeracy. The characteristics of each school are summarised and presented in

Table **3**.

Table 3

Characteristics of Participating Schools

School	School type	ICSEA	No. of students	% Students in top ICSEA quarter	% Students in lowest ICESA quarter	No. of teachers interviewed
1a	K-6	1013	541	24	27	0
1b	7-10	967	450	13	33	2
2	K-10	918	462	11	59	2
3a	K-6	891	274	0	70	2
3b	7-10	896	355	0	72	2
4	K-6	857	239	1	73	3
5a	K-6	876	251	3	50	0
5b	7-10	877	312	3	78	3
6	K-10	918	774	3	59	2
7	K-10	943	554	5	43	3

Note. K = Kindergarten.
Note. ICSEA = Index of Community and Educational Advantage.

Research Participants

Two participant samples were required for the completion of this research: student participants and teacher participants. Details of the participants are described below.

Student participants.

A total of 244 students from Tasmanian government schools participated in the research. As the data collection took place over a two-year period, the student participants were in Year 6 at the beginning of the research, and in Year 7 at the completion of the data collection phase. Of the participating students, 55% experienced an external transition from a kindergarten to Year 6 primary school to a Year 7 to Year 10 secondary school, and 45% experienced an internal transition within a kindergarten to Year 10 district school. Student participants ranged in age from 11 to 13 years, with a mean age of 12 years old (SD = 0.32). Of the student participants, 55% were male and 45% were female.

Teacher participants.

The second group of participants in the research project were English/Literacy teachers who taught either a Year 6 class or Year 7 English/Literacy class. The teacher participants were nominated by the school principal in accordance with the requirements outlined in the information sheets (see Appendix B). Twenty-two primary and secondary teachers were initially requested for participation. Principals from one of the primary schools and one of the Year 7 to 10 secondary schools declined the interview invitation and, as a result, the final teacher participant sample was 19. Five of these were Year 6 primary school teachers, seven

were Year 7 secondary teachers and the remaining seven were Year 6 and Year 7 district school teachers. Of the teacher participants, 21% were male and 79% were female. Of the teacher participants, the Year 6 teachers taught the participating students when they were in Year 6 (pre-transition) and the Year 7 teachers taught the participating students when they were in Year 7 (post transition).

Research Instruments

The research utilised three instruments for the process of data collection. The student participant data were collected via the use of two standardised tests: the *PAT-R* for comprehension (Stephanou et al., 2008) and the *SWST* for spelling (Sacre & Masterson, 2000). The teacher data were collected through the use of open ended, semi-structured interviews. The testing instruments are described below.

Standardised tests.

Two standardised test instruments were employed for the collection of student data to determine any changes in the reading and spelling achievement of students across the transition period: the *PAT-R* is a measure of students' skills in reading and comprehension and the *SWST* measures students' alphabetical and phonological knowledge. Standardised tests were appropriate instruments for the collection of student data, as they enabled students' individual skills in reading and spelling to be measured against a particular standard, where comparisons could be made between individual test scores from one year to the next.

The *PAT-R* and the *SWST* were chosen as suitable standardised tests of assessment as they are highly recognised and established tests within Australia. They have been designed for the Australian educational context, but are not exclusive to this setting (ACARA, 2013).

Both the *PAT-R* and the *SWST* are valid and reliable literacy tests that have been normed for Australian students from the early primary years through to secondary schooling, where test items increase in difficulty from one year to the next. The tests also align with the *National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN*) tests (ACARA, 2013), providing a profile of information on a student's reading, comprehension and spelling performance. In addition, the tests have been designed to measure Australian students' literacy achievement across the school years (ACARA, 2013).

Due to their established presence in Australian schools, it was advantageous to use the *PAT-R* and the *SWST* as they were approved Tasmanian literacy tests familiar to both teachers and students. Each test had been designed for the Australian literacy educational context and had standardised norms based on Australian students. Each test had an accompanying manual for test delivery. One of the main advantages to using these standardised tests was that they require administration in accordance to a specified procedure. This ensured each test was administered in the same manner across each of the schools, increasing the reliability of the results. A further description of the *PAT-R* and the *SWST* has been provided below.

Progressive Achievement Test in Reading (PAT-R).

The *PAT-R* (Stephanou et al., 2008) was designed to assess a student's reading and comprehension skills, as well as their skills in vocabulary knowledge and spelling. The three components of the *PAT-R* are structured to enable a wide range of year levels to be assessed validly, providing an estimate of a student's capabilities across the three literacy components. The *PAT-R* has been thoroughly researched and it has been normed for measuring and tracking student achievement (Stephanou et al., 2008). One of the strengths of this test is that it provides teachers with objective information for setting realistic learning goals and

planning effective literacy programs. The contents of the *PAT-R* are designed to reflect students' interests, featuring a variety of different text types and uses of language (Stephanou et al., 2008). The *PAT-R* is a norm referenced assessment where student performance or performances are compared to a larger group of students. For the *PAT-R*, the larger group, or norm group, is a national sample representing a wide and diverse cross-section of students. Students, schools, regions, and even states and territories are compared in relation to the norm group. These assessments or tests comprise a fixed set of test items, and specific directions for administration and scoring. The *PAT-R* (Test 7) contained 35 items and students were allocated 40 minutes to complete the test (Stephanou et al., 2008). An example is provided as Appendix C.

There were explicit purposes for using the *PAT-R* as an assessment tool for this research. First, the *PAT-R* was chosen to enable an independent, objective and standardised assessment of students' reading capabilities to be recorded over time. As an estimate of students' achievement in literacy, it was a constructed scale that allowed the raw scores from each student participant to be recorded and compared over time. Of central importance to this semi-longitudinal study, the *PAT-R* enabled students' literacy performance to be monitored over time from two administrations of the same test, revealing any increases or decreases in literacy capabilities over the two year period.

Single Word Spelling Test (SWST).

The *SWST* (Sacre & Masterson, 2000) was a test used in Australian schools, designed to assess the spelling capabilities of students from 5 to 15 years old. An example is provided in Appendix D). The test enabled teachers to identify gaps in students' knowledge of the spelling system in English at a particular point in time. It also allowed for tracking individual student progress over successive school years. There are nine related versions of the test that

increase in difficulty as a student progresses through school, with each test offering a raw score of spelling achievement. The *SWST* series has been standardised and the obtained reliability measures of student results derived from these tests is high, varying between 0.94 and 0.97. The reliability of the test used for this research (Test F) is 0.96, with a standard error measurement of 2.83. The *SWST* had both content validity and concurrent validity, whereby student achievement in reading and writing has been found to increase with increasing *SWST* scores. The correlation between these scores in reading and writing is between 0.51 and 0.79 for reading, and between 0.53 and 0.79 for writing (all $p<0.001$) (Sacre & Masterson, 2000). *The SWST* contained 50 items and with no set administration time, but generally took 30 minutes for students to complete.

The results from these tests enabled teachers to become informed of a student's immediate learning targets, therefore providing sufficient information for teachers to create effective plans of spelling instruction. Each *SWST* was assessed in accordance with specific guidelines for analyses of students' errors on any version of the test. This error analysis provided a detailed assessment of a student's spelling knowledge and enabled a structured spelling list to be used as a resource for future spelling instruction. The *SWST* was chosen as an assessment tool for this research to enable an independent, objective and standardised assessment of students' spelling capabilities to be recorded over time, an important consideration in this semi-longitudinal study.

Teacher interviews.

The third instrument used for the collection of data was an open-ended, semi-structured interview. This instrument was used for the collection of data from Year 6 and Year 7 teachers, and enabled general and specific information from the teachers to be collected regarding their teaching practice. The interviews were conducted by the researcher

and consisted of 19 questions (see Appendices E and F). The duration of each interview was approximately one hour in length. The interview process was semi-structured, for although the same questions were asked of each teacher by the same interviewer, teachers also had opportunities to expand and provide different levels of detail associated with the question, such that ideas were discussed in depth and in greater length when and where necessary. The semi-structured nature of the interviews also enabled discussions to be stimulated and particular points of interest to be clarified, by both the teacher participants and the researcher.

Interviews are one of the most effective ways for participants to communicate their own thoughts, ideas, personal beliefs and opinions. This research aimed to achieve an insight into the perceptions teachers held in regards to effective literacy practices across transition. To enable a detailed understanding of these perceptions, it was important that participants were given the opportunity to express their thoughts and their ideas. Incorporating interviewing as a method of data collection meant that information could be acquired through active interactions between the researcher and the participants, whereby the interview process enabled a verbal exchange to occur between the researcher and the participants.

The use of interviews as a data collection tool aligned with the qualitative element of the research, which was concerned with the perceptions teachers held towards literacy teaching and the transition phase. It has been proposed that interviews are one of the most powerful ways through which researchers can gather talk as data, and according to Lichtman (2006), the use of interviews as a data collection tool is one of the most important methods used by qualitative researchers. Vygotsky (1987) stated that every word people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness (pp. 236-237). Although researchers have been interested in hearing people' stories for many years, interviews were not widely accepted in the field of education. However, interviews are now used as a popular means of inquiry in order to understand the stories people have to share, and to understand their "lived

experiences" and how they make meaning from these experiences (Seidman, 2013). One of the primary ways for a research to investigate an educational organisation, institution or process is through the experience of individuals, and interviews enable this level of inquiry to occur (Seidman, 2013).

Engaging in the interview process enabled participants opportunities to communicate their thoughts and ideas on any given topic, revealing to the researcher insights into the varying accounts, beliefs or opinions held by an individual. Prominent qualitative data researchers Atkinson and Silverman (1997) stated that all individuals live in an interview society. This was particularly true for the present research, as teachers themselves are constantly subjected to being interviewed. Students interview teachers on a daily basis, to find out answers or query the many complicated elements of life, and to use this obtained information, or data, to make informed choices. Similarly, parents interview teachers about their child's progress and the current programs being used in the classroom, and parent/teacher interview are common practice in Australian schools. Teachers as colleagues also comply with the interview process, where they are constantly seeking information, data, feedback, and ideas, by asking each other questions on numerous topics, such as best ways to plan a lesson or how a particular child is going in class.

Data Collection

Each method of data collection was utilised for the different participant samples, in order to gather different types of information about students' literacy achievement across transition and teacher practice. Data collection took place in three phases. In the first phase of the research (referred to as Phase 1), quantitative data were collected from student participants (N=253) via two testing instruments: the *PAT-R* and the *SWST*. The second phase of data collection, Phase 2, involved a second round of quantitative data collection from

student participants, and replicated Phase 1. Lastly, the collection of qualitative data was undertaken in Phase 3, in the form of interviews with teacher participants. The Year 6 teachers taught students when they were Year 6 and the Year 7 teachers taught the students in Year 7. This methodology is summarised in Table 4.

Table 4

Method of Data Collection for each Research Phase

Research Question	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Quantitative *SWST* & *PAT-R*	Qualitative
1	✓	✓		✓	
2	✓	✓		✓	
3	✓	✓		✓	
4			✓		✓
5			✓		✓
6			✓		✓

Note. *PAT-R* = Progressive Achievement Test in Reading
Note. *SWST* = Single Word Spelling Test

Phase 1.

Upon ethics approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee and the Department of Education, the researcher contacted the principals of four primary schools and three district schools, inviting them to participate in the study. Upon principal consent, information packs outlining the aims and details of the study were sent to each individual school.

To ensure consistency across the sample, a testing officer was employed to administer the *PAT-R* and the *SWST* to Year 6 students in each of the participating schools. Procedures

for administering the *PAT-R* test were directed by the *Progressive Achievement Test in Reading: Comprehension, Vocabulary and Spelling* manual (Stephanou et al., 2008) (Appendix G), and procedures for administering the *SWST* were directed by *The Single Word Spelling Test* manual (Sacre & Masterson, 2000) (Appendix H).

The testing sessions took place in the morning and were conducted in the students' usual classrooms to ensure students were in a familiar and comfortable environment. Students first completed the *PAT-R Comprehension* test (Test 7) and, after approximately a one hour break, students then completed the *SWST* (Test F). The tests were completed individually by each Year 6 student under strict testing conditions.

It was a requirement of the testing process for students to place their name and the name of their school on their answer sheet to enable them to be re-identified at a later stage in the research. Names of students and their schools were seen only by the researcher. To ensure confidentiality beyond the researcher, each participating student was given a unique student identification number which was placed on their answer sheet. This identification number enabled students to be re-identified without compromising their confidentiality throughout the study.

After all Year 6 students had been tested from each of the participating schools, *PAT-R* and *SWST* answer sheets were gathered by the testing officer and delivered by post to the researcher.

Phase 2.

With the goal of complementing the student data gathered from Phase 1, the researcher contacted the principals of three Year 7 to Year 10 secondary feeder schools. The principals from the same three district schools as Phase 1 were also contacted to take part in Phase 2. Upon principal consent, the students who were tested in Phase 1 were re-identified by the

researcher and constituted the participant sample for Phase 2. At this phase of the research, the students had transitioned to secondary school and were in Year 7.

Using methods consistent with Phase 1, the students completed the *PAT-R* and the *SWST* for a second time, which was administered by the same testing officer under the same conditions, using the same test instruments as had been done the previous year. After the Year 7 students had been retested from each of the participating schools, the *PAT-R* and *SWST* answer sheets were gathered by the testing officer and delivered to the researcher by post. Upon receipt of all test papers, the *PAT-R* answer sheets were sent to the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) for marking. The researcher marked the *SWST* from each participating student. Test results for each individual student were then entered into an Excel file. The time difference between Phase 1 and Phase 2 of testing was one year.

Phase 3.

In the second year of the data collection process, information sheets and consent forms were emailed and sent via post to the principals of all the schools who had agreed to participate in the student testing process (N=10), inviting them to participate in the final stage of data collection: teacher interviews. Consent was granted from eight of the chosen schools, with two primary schools choosing to decline the interview process due to variables outside the researcher's control.

Upon principal consent, two teachers were requested from each school to participate in the interview process. Teachers were nominated by their school principal based on the requirement that they were teaching English/Literacy to Year 6 or Year 7 students. Once the teacher participants were chosen, they were sent information letters and consent forms via email and post, outlining the purpose of the study and the interview procedure.

While the researcher anticipated that two teachers would be available from each school, some schools offered three teachers to participate in the interview process. This was welcomed by the researcher, who valued the enthusiasm and willingness of the teachers. It was initially anticipated that all interviews would be conducted one-on-one with the researcher. Due to school commitments and other variables outside of the researcher's control, it became a requirement that some interviews be conducted as group interviews. A total of five primary (Year 6), seven secondary (Year 7) and seven district (Year 6 or Year 7) school teachers participated in the interview process.

The researcher visited each of the participating schools to conduct the interviews. The interviews took place in a quiet, private and comfortable space within the school, and each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, depending on the extent of information given by the teachers. All interviews were audio-taped and handwritten notes were also taken by the researcher during the interview process.

The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of a series of 19 open-ended questions. Each interview began with a brief summary of the aims of the research. The teacher participants were asked questions about their perceptions of the transition phase, their own teaching practice within the area of English/Literacy, and about the methods they used in order to prepare students for the transition into secondary school. Prompts were not used during the interview process, but teachers were given the opportunity to add additional information in order to illustrate their responses in relation to any of the questions.

For ethical purposes, participants were reminded that their participation was entirely voluntary, that their responses would remain confidential and that they could decline to answer a question or withdraw from the study at any stage. At the conclusion of the interview process, all interviews were played back by the researcher and transcribed word for word.

Data Analysis

Student test results.

Once student test data were collected and coded for the 253 students, data were analysed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v.18). SPSS is a computer application that provides statistical analysis of data. The program enables in-depth data access, analytical reporting, graphics and modelling. Descriptive statistics (*means, standard deviations, frequencies, skewness, maximum, minimum* and *Kurtosis*) were performed to gain an understanding of demographic variables (age, ICSEA and type of school) and literacy proficiency scores (*PAT-R* and *SWST*). To determine the extent to which the four demographic variables were correlated, a *Spearman's rho* (a measure of the linear relationship between variables) was conducted. The categorical variable, type of school progression, was transformed into three dichotomous variables (primary schools, secondary schools and district schools). In addition, a *Pearson's correlation* (a measure of the linear correlation, or dependence, between two variables, X and Y, giving a value between +1 and −1 inclusive, where 1 is total positive correlation, 0 is no correlation, and −1 is negative correlation) was performed to determine the relationship between students' *PAT-R* and *SWST* test scores in Year 6 and in Year 7 across the two tests.

Data were further analysed to compare student test performance across two independent variables: ICSEA and type of school progression. These investigations enabled exploration of the relationships that existed between ICSEA, type of school progression and student test performance. To establish an understanding of differences between *PAT-R* and *SWST* performance in Year 6 and Year 7, inferential statistics were performed, where separate analyses were undertaken to ascertain the effect of type of school progression and ICSEA rating on *PAT-R* and *SWST* scores.

A number of statistical analyses were conducted on the test results over the two-year period, including a *Cohen's d* (used to measure the standardised difference between two means) to determine the difference between mean scores of individual schools and to identify which schools experienced the greatest change in *PAT-R* and *SWST* scores from Year 6 to Year 7. To ascertain the effect of type of school progression, times of test and ICSEA on *PAT-R* and *SWST* scores, *Multivariate Analysis of Variance* (*MANOVA*) tests (a statistical procedure that simultaneously tests differences amongst the means of two or more dependent variables), and repeated measures *Analysis of Variance* (*ANOVA*) tests (an inferential statistical procedure used to test differences between means where one factor is measured at each level for every subject), were also conducted. The use of *ANOVA* as a method of analysis was appropriate for this research which was mulit-levelled and involded mixed cell sizes (Tabachnick, & Fidell, 2007). Follow up analyses of Year 6 and Year 7 scores for *PAT-R* and *SWST* were performed to obtain school level comparisons of literacy outcomes.

Teacher interview data.

At the conclusion of the interview process, the teacher participant responses were transcribed. The data set was then read through several times to gain familiarity with each teacher's interview responses, and then coded and themed using a modified approach of thematic analysis, based on the work of Braun and Clarke (2006). According to these researchers, thematic analysis is the foundational method for qualitative research. It is embedded within essentialist and constructivist paradigms, and is a rich and flexible research tool which provides rich, detailed and complex accounts of data. This type of analysis enabled a deep understanding of teachers' perceptions of the transition phase, and an insight into the types of literacy practices primary, secondary and district school teachers were using in their classrooms.

To begin the analysis, the interview data were organised into three distinct groups according to school: primary school teachers, secondary school teachers and district school teachers. The procedure of the modified approach to the thematic analysis used has been summarised below:

1. Initial interview data were read and re-read to enable a thorough understanding of the participants' responses.
2. The 19 interview questions were analysed individually for each teacher participant. Common responses to each question were counted and the number of frequencies was recorded (see Appendix I).
3. Initial codes were generated by labelling the most frequent responses.
4. Patterns, including similarities and differences, were identified in the codes, which were then collapsed into categories (see Appendix J).
5. Categories were compared and those with common attributes were further collapsed into over-arching themes.
6. Themes were re-examined to determine whether they supported the data.
7. Data were revisited to ensure analysis was complete.
8. Themes were defined and described.

This coding process was used to enabled an exploration and identification of the practices and programs used by Year 6 and Year 7 teachers across primary, secondary and district schools. Similarities in these codes enabled categories to be created and patterns in the teacher responses to be identified. From these patterns, dominant themes emerged from the data, and enabled an identification of the practices and programs teachers were using in their classrooms across the transition phase, as well as an insight into the professional

opinions of the teachers as to how to best improve the transition experience for students. The final stage of the thematic analysis process involved naming each theme, in order to provide an accurate representation of the content and tell an accurate story of the data.

Chapter Summary

Data for the present research were gathered via two methods: student test scores and teacher interviews. While the test data served to provide an insight into the reading and spelling achievement of adolescent students as they transitioned from Year 6 into Year 7, the teacher interview data enabled teachers' perceptions of the transition phase and their literacy practices to be identified. Student data were analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics allowing generalisations to be made from the specific sample, whereas the interviews provided more detail and descriptive insights into the schools' and the teachers' pedagogical approaches and methods. Whilst the two data sets were different in terms of design, they were intended to complement each other rather than be mutually exclusive.

This chapter has presented the methodology utilised for the research investigation. Divided into six sections, the chapter has provided detail about the participants, the research instruments, as well as the collection and analysis of data. Through student testing and teacher interviews, this research enabled an understanding of the importance the transition phase was for both students and teachers in regards to student reading and spelling achievement and teacher practice. The proceeding chapter, Results, presents a comprehensive discussion of the research findings.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of both the students' semi-longitudinal test data and the teacher interview response data. In regards to students' test data, the evidence provided and described in this chapter enabled insight to be gained into the impact the transition phase had upon adolescent students' reading and spelling achievement, as determined by students' scores on the *PAT-R* and the *SWST*. Students completed these tests when they were in Year 6 and then for a second time a year later when students were in Year 7. This chapter also reports the evidence gathered from a series of teacher interviews which revealed the types of literacy teaching practices and programs Year 6 and Year 7 teachers used in their classrooms to prepare students for the transition phase and for secondary literacy learning. The results present findings from two different and contrasting methodological approaches, quantitative data (student test scores) and qualitative data (teacher interviews). This enables an association between the data from these two approaches to be explored in an attempt to investigate whether a relationship existed between students' *PAT-R* and *SWST* achievement and the methods of transition and literacy preparation that were being used by Year 6 and Year 7 teachers.

This chapter has been structured around the six research questions, with all research findings discussed under the associated research question. Presenting the results in this manner was deliberate and purposeful, not only to ensure all findings were explained in relation to the research questions, but also to aid the flow and cohesiveness of the chapter. The research questions have been clearly stated below and can be revisited when navigating through the content of the chapter.

1. Does the transition from primary school into secondary school have an impact upon adolescent students' literacy achievement as determined by the *PAT-R* (Stephanou et al., 2008) and the *SWST* (Sacre & Masterson, 2000) scores?
2. Do students who transition into secondary school externally experience greater declines in their literacy achievement as determined by the *PAT-R* and the *SWST* than students who transition into secondary school internally?
3. Do students from schools located in higher socioeconomic areas perform better on the *PAT-R* and *SWST* than students from schools located in low socioeconomic areas during the transition phase?
4. What literacy practices and programs do teachers in primary schools, secondary schools and district schools use to prepare adolescent students for the demands of secondary school literacy?
5. What methods do teachers in primary schools, secondary schools and district schools use to prepare students for the transition phase?
6. What methods do teachers perceive as being most necessary for the promotion of literacy development in adolescent learners across the transition phase?

The *PAT-R* and *SWST*

The study took place over a two year period. The quantitative data were collected from ten participating schools. Test results from adolescent students (N=237) who attended the participating schools constituted the quantitative data, whereby students' reading and comprehension abilities were measured and determined by the ACER *PAT-R*, developed by Stephanou et al. in 2008, and students' spelling abilities were measured and determined by the *SWST* (Sacre & Masterson, 2000).

Correlation between tests.

When looking first at the relationship between the two tests over time there was a significant correlation between the students' test scores. As can be seen in Table 5, the correlation between these tests was high, with *PAT-R* showing $r = 0.74$ correlation between the two years, and spelling indicating a very high correlation between the two data points of $r = 0.94$. The spelling and the reading scores were moderately correlated ($r = 0.62$ and 0.54), suggesting that these are different but related literacy variables. What is interesting is the difference in correlation between spelling and reading over the two years, whereby spelling revealed little change between the two points $r = 0.94$, but more variability identified with reading comprehension ($r = 0.74$). See Table 5.

Table 5

Correlation Matrix for Year 6 and Year 7 PAT-R and SWST Scores

	PAT-R Year 6	*PAT-R* Year 7	*SWST* Year 6	*SWST* Year 7
PAT-R Year 6	1			
PAT-R Year 7	.74**	1		
SWST Year 6	.62**	.54**	1	
SWST Year 7	.62**	.54**	.94**	1

Note. N= 237
**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed), * Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As can be seen, all four scores were significantly correlated, with *SWST* Year 6 and Year 7 scores particularly correlated to the point of singularity.

Students' Test Achievement across Transition

Research Question 1: Does the transition from primary school into secondary school have an impact upon adolescent students' literacy achievement as determined by PAT-R and SWST scores?

To investigate Research Question 1, this section of the results draws on the research evidence and describes the impact that the students' transition phase had upon students' performances on the *PAT-R* and the *SWST*.

Overall student achievement and *PAT-R*.

Across the target group of 10 schools, and based on the same cohort of students, results revealed an overall decrease in student *PAT-R* scores from a mean = 22.74 in Year 6, to a mean = 21.60 in Year 7. A repeated measures *Analysis of Variance* (*ANOVA*) indicated that the decrease in test scores was statistically significant (F=14.491 (1,196), p<.001), tabled below.

Table 6

Students' PAT-R Scores in Year 6 and Year 7

Test/Year	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*
PAT-R Year 6	219	22.74	6.38
PAT-R Year 7	203	21.60	6.63

Note. PAT-R = Progressive Achievement Test in Reading

As can be seen, when focusing on the cohort overall, on average students' test scores declined from the end of primary school to end of their first year of secondary school in terms of both reading and comprehension as measured by the *PAT-R*.

Overall student achievement and *SWST*.

The repeated measured *ANOVA* revealed that student achievement on the *SWST* increased during the transition phase, such that overall, on average students obtained higher spelling scores (F=6.305 (1,215), p<.05) at the end of first year secondary school (M = 31.76), than they did at the end of their final year at primary school (M = 31.41). Means and standard deviations are presented below in Table 7.

Table 7

Students SWST Scores in Year 6 and Year 7

Test/Year	***N***	***Mean***	***SD***
SWST Year 6	244	31.41	13.42
SWST Year 7	228	31.76	13.24

Note. SWSTR = Single Word Spelling Test

Unlike the students' achievement in reading and comprehension which declined from Year 6 into Year 7, Table 7 suggests that students' spellings skills increased during the transition phase, whereby students obtained higher *SWST* results after they had made the transition into secondary school.

Transition and Achievement at the Individual School Level

The results discussed above present the overall picture of the impact transition had upon students' *PAT-R* and *SWST* scores from end of primary school to the end of first year secondary school, when examined as a single cohort. Follow up analyses were further

conducted in order to investigate the effects of transition upon students' test scores at the individual school level. These findings are discussed below.

Students' achievement and *PAT-R*.

The differences in students' *PAT-R* mean test scores from Year 6 to Year 7 can be seen in Figure 1 below.

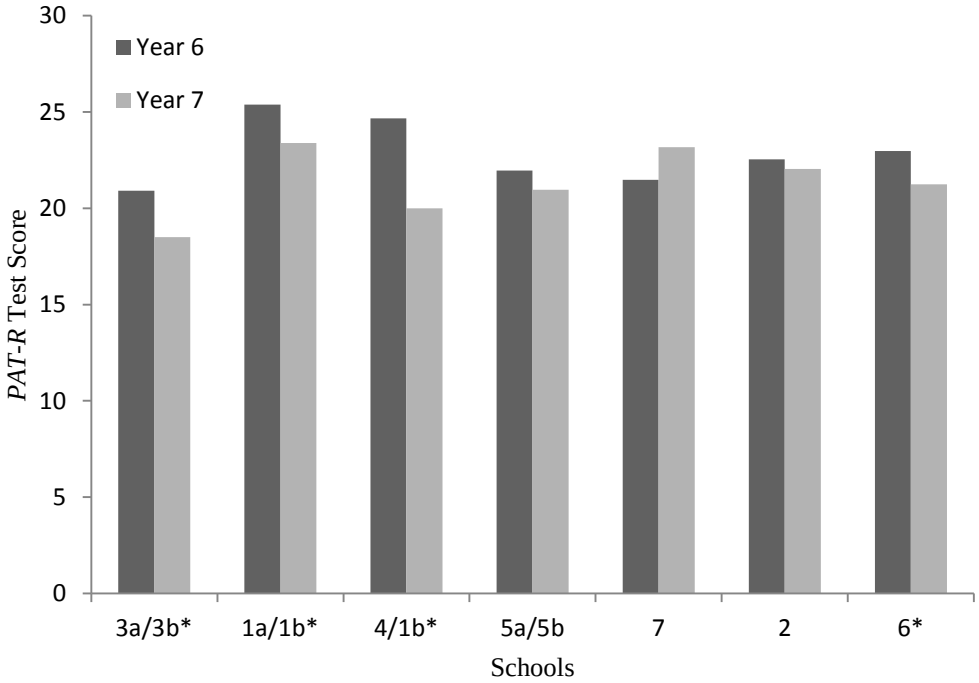

Figure 1. Mean *PAT-R* scores for participating schools from Year 6 and Year 7.
*Indicates decrease was statistically significant whereby $p < .05$

Comparing students' reading achievement in Year 6 with the same students' reading performance in Year 7, there was a significant difference between these two data collection points (F=18.13 (1,196) p<.001) whereby students' *PAT-R* scores significantly decreased from Year 6 (M = 22.74) to Year 7 (M = 21.60). As noted in Figure 1, for six of the seven secondary schools involved in this study the students' reading performance decreased, with only one school, identified as School 7, demonstrating some level of reading improvement.

A *Cohen's d* analysis was conducted to verify and identify the difference between mean scores of individual schools across the two year period, in order to identify which individual schools experienced the greatest change in *PAT-R* across the transition phase.

Table 8

Cohen's d Value for Students' PAT-R Achievement in Year 6 and Year 7

School	***N***	***M* Year 6**	***SD* Year 6**	***M* Year 7**	***M* Year 7**	***Cohen's d Value***
School 1a/1b	42	25.38	5.53	23.38	6.12	-0.34#
School 2	26	22.54	7.50	22.04	7.37	-0.07
School 3a/3b	30	20.90	6.39	18.50	6.72	-0.36#
School 4a/1b	3	24.67	1.53	20.00	4.00	-1.54##
School 5a/5b	28	21.96	5.98	20.96	6.34	-0.16
School 6	45	22.96	5.86	21.24	5.89	-0.29#
School 7	29	21.48	7.69	23.17	7.36	+0.22

#Indicates moderate effect size ##Indicates large effect size

Table 8 demonstrates that the largest difference in mean test scores occurred between School 4a and School 1b, whereby, for the students who transitioned between these schools, their reading significantly declined as they progressed from Year 6 (M = 24.67, SD = 1.53) into Year 7 (M = 20.00, SD = 4.01), with a large Cohen's d effect size (d = -1.54) suggesting a high, significant change in the students' reading performance. Students from Schools 3a and 3b also demonstrated a decline in reading achievement from Year 6 (M = 20.90, SD = 6.39) to Year 7 (M = 18.50, SD = 6.72), demonstrating a moderate effect size decease (d = -0.36). Students transitioning across Schools 1a and 1b also demonstrated a decline in reading

test scores from Year 6 (*M* = 25.38, *SD* = 5.53) to Year 7 (*M* = 23.38, *SD* = 6.12), with a Cohen's *d* effect size value (*d* = 0.34) demonstrating a moderate difference, and a decline in reading scores. The Cohen's *d* analysis found small effect sizes for the remaining schools (*d* = <0.25).

Students' achievement and *SWST*.

The second point of interest for Research Question 1 was to determine whether the transition into secondary school had an impact upon student achievement in spelling at the individual school level. As illustrated in Figure 2, on average, students' spelling results remained steady across the transition period, with no significant difference identified in terms of students' spelling performance from Year 6 to Year 7.

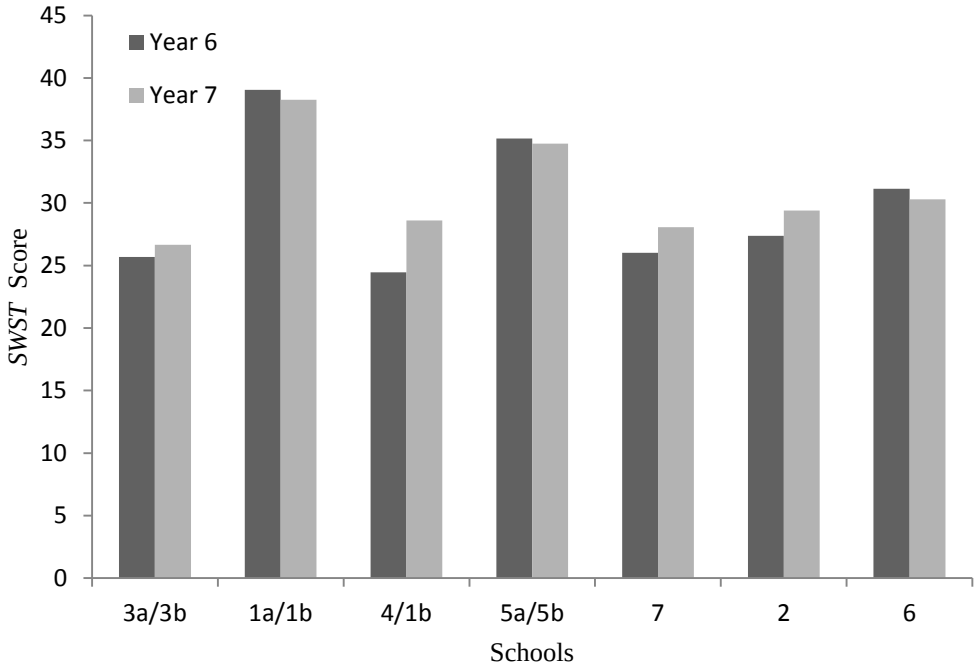

Figure 2. Mean *SWST* scores for participating schools from Year 6 and Year 7.

Figure 2 reveals that, of the participating schools, students who transitioned from School 4 to School 1b reported the highest increase in *SWST* scores from Year 6 (M = 24.40, SD = 16.01) to Year 7 (M = 28.60, SD = 13.13), with School 4 almost achieving a statistically significant improvement difference in reading scores at $p>.05$.

Students' spelling test scores from School 2 also showed some small increase from Year 6 (M = 27.37, SD = 15.02) to Year 7 (M = 29.41, SD = 15.19), as well as students from School 7 in Year 6 (M = 26.03, SD = 14.07) and Year 7 (M = 28.06, SD = 13.45), and Schools 3a and 3b in Year 6 (M = 25.69, SD = 13.99) and Year 7 (M = 26.65, SD = 13.28). The remaining schools experienced a small decline in their *SWST* achievement across the transition phase. Although increases and decreases were present when examining the *SWST* achievement of each school individually, in no case were they significantly different, $p>.05$.

A *Cohen's d* analysis was conducted in order to verify and identify the difference between mean scores of individual schools across the two-year period, to identify which individual schools experienced the greatest change in *SWST* across the transition phase. Results from this analysis are presented below in Table 9, and using this test procedure School 4 demonstrated a moderate (significant) effect size improvement, in student spelling performance from Year 6 to Year 7.

Table 9

Cohen's d Value for Students' SWST Achievement in Year 6 and Year 7

School	***N***	***M* Year 6**	***SD* Year 6**	***M* Year 7**	***M* Year 7**	***Cohen's d Value***
School 1a/1b	50	39.06	9.79	38.25	10.75	-0.07
School 2	27	27.37	15.02	29.41	15.19	+0.13
School 3a/3b	32	25.69	13.99	26.65	13.28	+0.07
School 4a/1b	5	24.40	16.01	28.60	13.13	+0.28
School 5a/5b	33	35.15	11.22	34.75	11.53	-0.03
School 6	50	31.14	13.15	30.30	12.98	-0.06
School 7	31	26.03	14.07	28.06	13.45	+0.15

#Indicates moderate effect size.

Table 9 reveals small differences between students' mean *SWST* scores from Year 6 to Year 7, demonstrating that, overall, the students' spelling performance did not indicate much change from primary to secondary school (d = <0.25). The main improvement in the spelling data was reported between School 4 a and School 1b, (*Cohen's d* = +0.28).

Type of Transition and Students' Literacy Achievement

Research Question 2: Do students who transition into secondary school externally experience greater declines in their literacy achievement as determined by the PAT-R and the SWST than students who transition into secondary school internally?

Research Question 2 aimed to explore whether students who transitioned externally experienced a greater decline in their *PAT-R* and *SWST* scores than students who transitioned into secondary school internally.

As illustrated below, analysis at the overall school level suggested that students who transitioned internally experienced smaller declines in their reading achievement as they transitioned from primary to secondary school than students who transitioned externally. In contrast, spelling ability was not found to be impacted by the type of transition students undertook. As with Research Question 1, this question has been discussed in two sections, *PAT-R* achievement and type of transition, and *SWST* achievement and type of transition.

***PAT-R* achievement and type of transition.**

An *ANOVA* was conducted to investigate whether the type of transition experienced by students had an impact upon their reading and comprehension skills, as determined by the *PAT-R* across the two-year testing period. The *ANOVA* revealed a significant reading performance difference for type of school ($F = 4.74$ (3, 196), $p<.05$) across the two groups over the two-year period. See Figure 3.

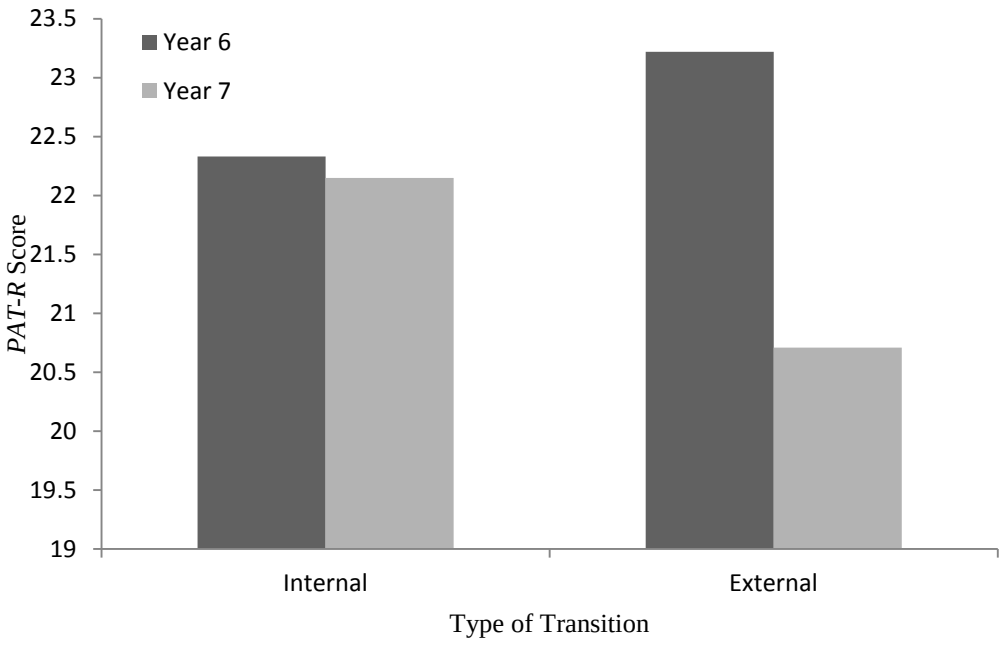

Figure 3. Students' mean *PAT-R* scores for internal and external transition

As can be seen in Figure 3, while overall student *PAT-R* scores were higher in Year 6 for students who transitioned externally to a new school (M = 23.22), the *PAT-R* scores for these students significantly declined after they transitioned into Year 7 (M = 20.71) (F=5.64 (1,98), p<.05). In comparison, students who stayed on the same campus did not demonstrate a significant change in *PAT-R* reading scores in Year 6 (M = 22.32) and Year 7 (M = 22.15), p>.05. These students were largely from rural areas. The evidence suggested that the transition into secondary school had the greatest negative impact on the reading and comprehension skills of students who experienced an external transition and relocated to a new campus to attend a separate secondary school.

***SWST* achievement and type of transition.**

Based on students' spelling scores, an *ANOVA* revealed a significant main effect by type of school transition (F=9.95 (1, 215), p<.001). As demonstrated in Figure 4, students

located in the same kindergarten to Year 10 district schools achieved lower spelling scores at Year 6 and Year 7 compared to the students who externally transitioned. See Figure 4.

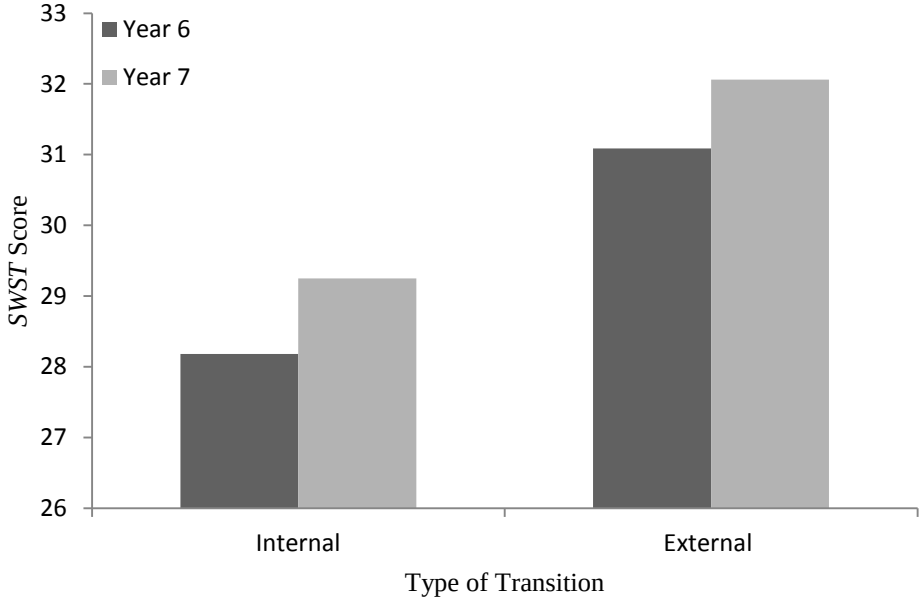

Figure 4. Students' mean *SWST* scores for internal and external transition

Figure 4 demonstrates that both the external transferring students and the internal transferring students experienced an increase in their *SWST* achievement.

In summary, the results demonstrate that students from the more urban centres, who transitioned externally from a primary school to a new secondary school, achieved higher *PAT-R* and *SWST* scores at Year 6 compared to the mainly rural students who transitioned internally and stayed on the same campus. Even so, the transition phase had the greatest negative influence on the reading performance of students who relocated to new secondary schools. Spelling was less influenced by transition from Year 6 to Year 7 with both cohorts of students demonstrating a steady rate of improvement.

Socioeconomic Status and Students' Literacy Achievement

Research Question 3: Do students from schools in higher socioeconomic areas perform better on the PAT-R and SWST than students from schools in low socioeconomic areas during the transition phase?

Research Question 3 investigated whether the socioeconomic area in which a school was located had an impact upon students' literacy achievement as they transitioned from Year 6 into Year 7. Table 10, overleaf, outlines each participating school in regards to their corresponding ICSEA value.

Table 10

ICSEA Rating for Participating Primary, Secondary and District Schools

School	Low ICSEA	Middle ICSEA	High ICSEA
School 1a			✓
School 1b		✓	
School 2			✓
School 3a	✓		
School 3b	✓		
School 4	✓		
School 5a	✓		
School 5b	✓		
School 6		✓	
School 7		✓	
Total	**5**	**3**	**2**

Socioeconomic status and *PAT-R.*

A *MONOVA* identified that there was some significant variability in the student reading performance across the schools identified as low, middle and high SES, with most of this variability occurring between students from low ISCEA schools and high ISCEA schools, at data point two when the students were in Year 7 (F=4.17 (2,196), p<. 05).

As shown in Figure 5, there is a similar pattern of reading performance across the schools by low, middle, and high ISCEA scores in Year 6, with no significant difference reported at this data collection point: Year 6 *PAT-R* low (*M* = 22.51), middle (*M* = 22.22), and high SES (*M* = 23.96). However, this pattern changed in Year 7, with students located in low (SES) ICSEA schools demonstrating a significant decline in reading performance (F=3.18 (2,97), p<. 05) from Year 6 to Year 7. Students in the middle SES schools maintained very similar reading performance scores, and students in the higher SES schools showed a trend towards a decline in reading performance: Year 7 *PAT-R* low (*M* = 19.82), middle (*M* = 22.20) and high SES (*M* = 22.71).

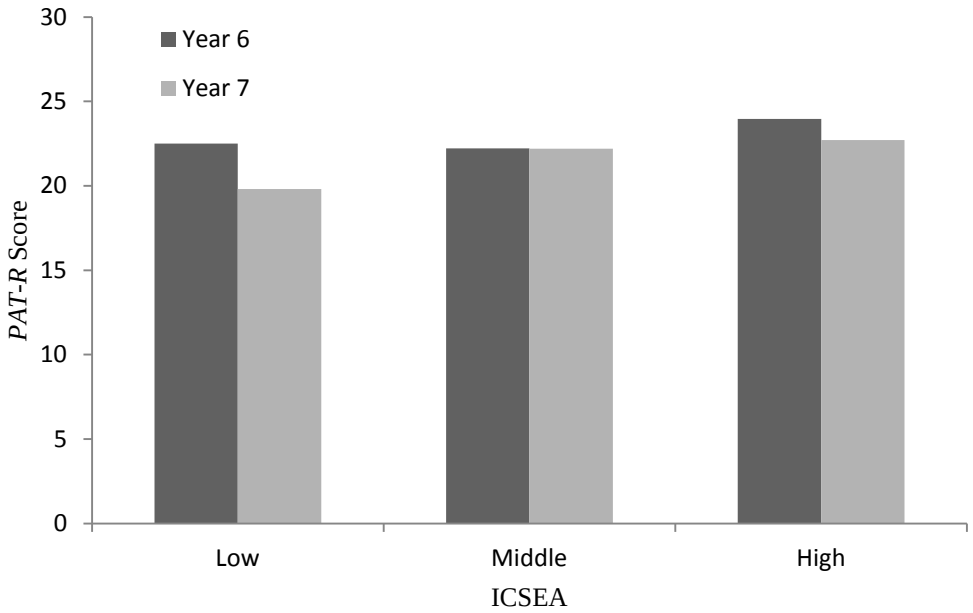

Figure 5. Students' *PAT-R* achievement across low, middle and high ICSEA schools

Socioeconomic status and *SWST*.

An *ANOVA* identified that there was significant variability (p<.01) in student spelling performance across the schools identified as low, middle and high for both Year 6 (F=5.27 (2,215), p<.01) and Year 7 (F=5.02 (2,209), p<.01). The greatest variability in spelling results

was between students from low and middle (SES) ICSEA schools compared to those students from high (SES) ICSEA schools. As can be seen in Figure 6, there is a similar pattern across the three SES groups for students showing steady improvement in spelling performance from Year 6 to Year 7. *SWST* scores for Year 6 by SES were: low *M* = 27.76; middle *M* = 27.08; and high *M* = 33.21. *SWST* scores for Year 7 by SES were: low *M* = 29.89; middle; *M* = 29.18; and high; *M* = 33.83.

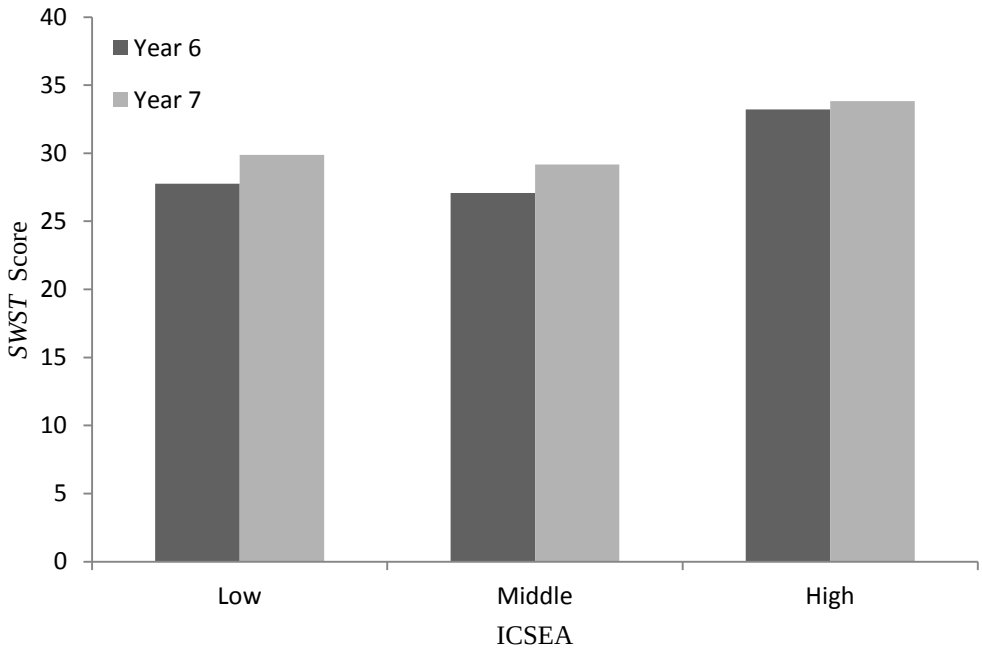

Figure 6. Students' *SWST* achievement across low, middle and high ICSEA schools

Summary of Student Achievement across Transition

This section of the results has addressed the first three research questions, as outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Analyses of students' reading and spelling achievement across the transition phase were conducted in order to identify the impact that the transition phase had upon the literacy achievement of students, as determined by the *PAT-R* and the *SWST*. Statistical analyses of the data revealed that the transition phase did impact the literacy

achievement of students whereby, overall, the evidence suggested that student achievement in reading significantly declined and student achievement in spelling remained steady.

A breakdown of reading and spelling achievement across individual schools revealed that the transition from primary school into secondary school may have had a different impact on students. The results revealed that type of school transition and the schools' SES did impact students' achievement on the *PAT-R* and *SWST*. In regards to literacy achievement and type of school, students who transitioned into secondary school externally experienced a greater decline in their *PAT-R* scores than students who remained on the same campus for transition. In regards to SES, the results demonstrated that students from high ICSEA schools had higher spelling and reading performance, compared to schools with lower ICSEA scores. Spelling was less influenced by transition than reading and, while there were some differences by SES for spelling, on average, spelling improved across all SES groups.

Teachers' Programs and Practices

To further investigate the transition phase and the impact that the move to secondary school has on adolescent student reading and spelling achievement, a series of one-on-one interviews were conducted with the Year 6 and Year 7 teachers of the participating schools. Two of the participating primary schools declined the interview process and, as a result, teachers from 8 out of the 10 schools were interviewed. A total of 19 teachers took part in one-on-one interviews, which were conducted by the researcher. Careful analyses of these data enabled insight to be gained into the types of programs and practices these teachers were using in their classrooms to promote literacy development and support students in their transition from primary school to secondary school. The analysis also enabled an identification of the types of practices and programs teachers felt were necessary in order to

improve the teaching of literacy in their classrooms and to enhance the transition experience for adolescent students.

Common Themes

Analyses of the teacher interview data identified five common themes that were developed from the coding and categorising process. These themes were identified through a modified process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as described in Chapter 3, Methodology. After the initial interview data were read and reread a number of times, the individual responses from each of the teachers in response to the 19 interview questions were counted. Frequencies in the teachers' responses were then recorded to determine the most common responses. This led to the development of initial codes in Appendix I. Similarities and differences were then identified in the teachers' responses and the codes were then collapsed into categories. These categories were compared, and those containing common attributes were further collapsed into five over-arching themes:

1. Preparing for Secondary School Literacy.
2. Preparing for Transition.
3. Communication.
4. Curriculum Continuity and Awareness.
5. Teacher Support.

In a similar presentation of the student test data, the remaining three research questions serve as a guide for the presentation and discussion of each theme. The themes offer a description of the types of programs and practices Year 6 and Year 7 teachers were using within their classrooms and their schools to promote literacy development across the

transition phase. The themes also reveal an identification of the types of programs and practices teachers felt were needed in order to improve the teaching of literacy in their classrooms and to enhance the transition experience for their students.

The following section presents a discussion of the main themes that were developed from the coding and categorising process. Each theme contains the views held by primary, secondary and district school teachers in regards to transition preparation and the transition phase. Examples of the teachers' responses have also been provided.

Preparing for secondary school literacy.

Research Question 4: What literacy practices and programs do primary school, secondary school and district school teachers use to prepare adolescent students for the demands of secondary school literacy?

To investigate Research Question 4, primary, secondary and district school teachers were asked to describe the methods they use to prepare students for secondary school literacy. Theme 1 was developed from four of the constructed categories developed during the process of thematic analysis (See Appendix J): preparing for the Year 7 curriculum (Category 4), common literacy practices (Category 5), common literacy programs (Category 6) and meeting literacy curriculum demands (Category 8). A description of these methods is presented below, in Table 11.

Table 11

Methods of Literacy Preparation as Reported by Primary, Secondary and District School Teachers

Method of Literacy Preparation	**Description**
Literacy Preparation	Methods used by teachers to prepare students for the demands of secondary school. These included structured reading, spelling and writing programs, daily literacy blocks, group work and integration.
Literacy Support	Support offered to students who were at risk of underachieving in literacy as they transitioned from Year 6 into Year 7. This support consisted of teacher's aide time or one-on-one time with an English/literacy teacher.
Achieve Grade Level	An emphasis on ensuring Year 6 students achieved grade level prior to entering Year 7.
Catch-up Programs	Additional literacy programs offered to students who were at risk of underachieving in literacy in Year 7.
Ability Groups	Dividing students into groups based on their literacy capabilities. This enabled the teachers to cater literacy tasks to students' needs.
Novel Study	A novel chosen by the teacher for students to study. This consisted of all students in the class reading the same novel and then completing activities based on the novel.
Writing Tasks	Writing exercises used on a regular basis. These included journal writing, autobiographical writing, text types and story writing.

Silent Reading	Individual reading time whereby students read silently for a set period of time as determined by the teacher.
Reading Groups	Small groups which consisted of students with similar reading capabilities.
Text Types	Specific forms of writing to achieve different purposes. These included: information reports, procedures, persuasive writing, narratives and recounts.
Weekly Tests	Tests were given to the students to assess their literacy capabilities. The most common was a spelling test.
Spelling Program	A set program used in the classroom designed to improve students' spelling skills. For example, *Words our Way.*
Reading Program	A set program used in the classroom designed to improve students' reading skills. For example, *Reader's Notebook*
Writing Program	A set program used in the classroom designed to improve students' writing skills. For example, *Writer's Notebook.*
Whole School Approach	Schools that utilised the same spelling, reading and writing programs in every year across the school were recognised as having a whole school approach to literacy teaching.

Preparing for the Year 7 curriculum.

The responses provided by the teachers revealed there to be both similarities and differences in the way literacy was taught in each of the three school types. Table 12 provides a summary of the most frequently reported methods of preparation, practices and programs that primary, secondary and district school teachers were using in their classrooms to prepare students for secondary school literacy. See Table 12.

Table 12

Interview Results Reporting Primary, Secondary and District School Teachers' Literacy Strategies

	% of 5 primary teachers	**% of 7 secondary teachers**	**% of 7 district teachers**	**% of all teachers interviewed**
Preparation				
Literacy Preparation	60% (3 of 5)	57% (4 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	74% (14 of 19
Literacy Support	60% (3 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	63% (12 of 19)
Achieve Grade Level	80% (4 of 5)	0 (0 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	58% (11 of 19)
Catch up Programs	0 (0 of 5)	0 (0 of 7)	42% (3 of 7)	16% (3 of 19)
Practices				
Integration	60% (3 of 5)	63% (4.5 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	89% (17 of 19)
Ability Groups	100% (5 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	71% (5 of 7)	63% (12 of 19)
Novel Study	100% (5 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	71% (5 of 7)	63% (12 of 19)
Writing Tasks	100% (5 of 5)	63% (4.5 of 7)	71% (5 of 7)	79% (15 of 19)
Silent Reading	100% (5 of 5)	71% (5 of 7)	28% (2 of 7)	37% (7 of 19)
Reading Groups	100% (5 of 5)	0 (0 of 7)	71% (5 of 7)	53% (10 of 19)
Text Types	60% (3 of 5)	71% (5 of 7)	42% (3 of 7)	58% (11 of 19)
Weekly Test	100% (5 of 5)	57% (4 of 7)	28% (2 of 7)	58% (11 of 19)
Programs				
Spelling Program	100% (5 of 5)	0 (0 of 7)	71% (5 of 7)	53% (10 of 19)
Reading Program	100% (5 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	71% (5 of 7)	63% (12 of 19)
Writing Program	100% (5 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	71% (5 of 7)	89% (17 of 19)
Whole School Approach	40% (2 of 5)	57% (4 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	68% (13 of 19)

Note. Primary Teachers: $N = 5$ Secondary Teachers: $N = 7$ District: Teachers: $N = 7$
Frequencies have been rounded to the nearest decimal place

As Table 12 reveals, the types of programs and practices teachers used to inform their literacy instruction varied between the three school types. This variation constituted the emergence of Theme 1: preparing for secondary school literacy, as it became evident from the data that methods of preparing students for literacy were different between the primary, secondary and district school teachers.

Discussions with the primary teachers revealed that the methods they used to assist their literacy instruction were structured and based on set programs, with an emphasis on teaching the skills of spelling, reading and writing through group work, teacher instruction and literacy programs. This was explained by one Year 6 teacher who taught in a primary school:

T13a It's fairly structured and it's like this because the students like to know what's going on – they don't like change much. We do spelling in the morning, we do a school wide program … then Writer's Notebook … Then we do reading groups. … This is for two hours every day.

In comparison, literacy teaching in the secondary schools was reported to be individualised for the students based on their level of capability, with an integrated approach to literacy instruction whereby literacy was incorporated into other subject areas such as SOSE (Studies of Society and the Environment). Many of the secondary teachers revealed that they did not utilise set literacy programs. Of the secondary teachers (N=7), there were none who had a spelling program in place and only 2 who used a specific reading program. One of the main findings was that many of the literacy practices used by the primary teachers were not used, or only used by a small number of teachers in the secondary schools. These included breaking students into ability groups, novel studies and reading groups, as well as

specific spelling and reading programs. This is evident in the following quote from one secondary school teacher in regards to the teaching of reading:

T61b You don't really teach it [reading] at high school … I expect them to read at home for half an hour a night … [I] don't actually teach reading, just give them the opportunity to read.

For the district school teachers, methods of literacy preparation and the types of programs and practices they used in their classrooms were similar to those utilised by both the primary and the secondary teachers. Like the primary teachers, the district teachers used structured literacy programs and had allocated blocks (set times during the school day which occurred on a regular basis for the teaching of reading, writing and spelling) for literacy teaching. Similar to the secondary teachers, integration with other subject areas was also highlighted as a common practice by the district teachers. The following quote reveals one district school teacher's methods of literacy instruction that incorporates a combination of the methods reported by the primary and secondary teachers:

T17S7 We do Reader's Notebook and independent reading for 20 minutes … we have small reading groups … we also do Writer's Notebook. … The kids have a spelling book they take to all their classes and put words in to go over in their spelling time. The kids are in spelling groups. … A lot of reading and writing occurs during SOSE.

As this dialogue reveals, teachers' methods for literacy instruction used by primary, secondary and district school teachers during the transition phase were varied, as were the programs and practices used by teachers across the three school types.

Literacy preparation.

In regards to literacy preparation, 60% (3 of the 5) of primary school teachers and 57% (4 of the 7) secondary school teachers stated that they prepared students for the transition into secondary school literacy. In comparison, all district school teachers (7 of the 7) engaged in methods of transition preparation. For the primary school teachers, ensuring students achieved grade level was the most important part of preparing students for secondary school, whereas none of the secondary school teachers reported this as a priority. In addition, the need to support students during transition was reported by 60% (3 of the 5) of primary school teachers, compared to only 28% (2 of the 7) of secondary school teachers. Providing catch-up programs for students was reported by 42% (3 of the 7) of district school teachers, but this strategy was not reported by the primary school or secondary school teachers.

Literacy practices.

The results revealed that all primary school teachers and most district school teachers reported a range of similar literacy practices to guide their literacy instruction, including breaking students into ability groups, novel studies, writing tasks and reading groups. In comparison, secondary school teachers focused on three specific practices: integration, writing tasks and teaching text types (see Table 11 for a description of these practices), indicating that there was a greater emphasis on writing than reading in the secondary school classrooms. Similar to the secondary school teachers, integration was the most common literacy practice used by all district school teachers.

Reading.

For both the primary school and the district school teachers, the most common methods of reading instruction were to group students according to their reading ability, to set comprehension tasks and to engage students in silent reading. Other methods included integrating reading within other subject areas and class novel studies. The secondary school teachers revealed that reading instruction was based on students developing an understanding of the content within a text, rather than the skills involved in the reading process, and included set novel studies, pre/present/post activities and chapter questions for the set novel. Interestingly, only 28% (2 of 7) of secondary school teachers stated that they taught reading in their English/literacy classes.

Spelling.

For the primary school teachers, common methods for teaching spelling were based around phonemes/sound and letter patterns, look-say-cover-write-check activities, weekly spelling tests and integrating spelling into other classrooms topics. This was not the case for secondary school teachers, whose methods for teaching spelling were based around dictionary definitions, breaking words into syllables, and placing words in alphabetical order. District school teachers reported utilising a combination of the methods used by primary school and secondary school teachers. Weekly spelling tests were used by all primary school teachers in comparison with 57% (4 of 7) of secondary school teachers and 28% (2 of 7) of district school teachers.

Writing.

All primary school teachers, all secondary school teachers and 71% (5 of the 7) of district school teachers reported that writing programs were used in their classrooms. For the primary school and district school teachers, common methods for teaching writing included journal writing and engaging students with “fun” topics, whereas district school teachers utilised integration (teaching literacy within other subject areas, such as history) as part of their writing practice. For all the secondary school teachers, there was an emphasis on the teaching of writing, whereby the secondary school teachers reportedly taught text types explicitly, and placed emphasis on how to create particular types of texts such as narratives, recounts and persuasive essays. The secondary school teachers stated that they engaged in regular writing activities with their students in order to ensure writing was practised on a regular basis.

Literacy programs.

All primary school teachers reported the use of set spelling, reading and writing programs to teach literacy in their classrooms. All secondary school teachers also used programs for the teaching of writing, but only 28% (2 of the 7) utilised reading programs, and none of them used a spelling program. In comparison, all district schools operated from a whole school approach (see description in Table 11) to literacy teaching, whereas only 40% (2 of the 5) of primary school and 57% (4 of 7) of secondary school teachers stated that their school had a whole school approach.

In summary, the teacher interview data indicate that there was a large amount of variability in the methods used by primary, secondary and district school teachers to teach literacy in their classrooms and to prepare students for the transition into secondary school literacy. Discussions with the teachers revealed that the district school teachers saw literacy

preparation as a priority, and therefore engaged in more literacy preparation practices than the primary and secondary schools. Catch-up programs and whole school approaches to the teaching of literacy were reported by the district school teachers as common methods of transition preparation to ensure a smooth transition into Year 7. In comparison, discussions with the primary school and secondary school teachers revealed a lack of consistency in regards to literacy practices and programs, with just over half of these teachers stating that they actively prepared students for secondary school literacy. The comprehensive and seamless approach to literacy preparation used by many of the district school teachers across the transition phase may have been a contributing factor to the success district school students achieved on the *PAT-R* and *SWST*.

Preparing for transition

Research Question 5: What methods do primary school, secondary school and district school teachers use to prepare students for the transition phase?

To investigate Research Question 5, primary, secondary and district school teachers were asked to describe the methods they used to prepare students for the transition into secondary school. A summary and description of these methods is presented in Table 13.

Table 13

Description of Teachers' Methods of Transition Preparation

Method of Transition Preparation	**Description**
Orientation Days	Structured days organised by secondary school staff whereby Year 6 students visit the secondary school campus. This was found to occur for a single day or a series of days. Year 6 students would participate in organised activities in accordance with their interests (see below) and also participate in a Year 7 classes. Parent/student information sessions were also part of the orientation programs.
Support for Students at Risk	This involved providing support for students at risk of underachievement during the transition phase. Types of support included increased one-on-one time, support from a teacher's aide or literacy support person, differentiated classroom work and catch-up programs.
Transition Program	A program for assisting students with the transition into secondary school. This program was designed by a staff member or transition coordinator and involved specific activities (see below) to support students during transition.
Activity Days	Activity days were a part of the transition program and took place on either the primary or secondary school campus. These days were organised by the secondary schools and run by the secondary school teachers or secondary students. Examples included rock-climbing, art, sports days, cooking classes.
Share/Collect Work Samples	This comprised Year 6 teachers sharing samples of Year 6 students' work with Year 7 teachers. This was to provide secondary school teachers with examples of the current achievement levels and capabilities of the Year 6 students. Work samples included writing tasks (such a journal writing) and project work.

Composite Classes	Year 6 and Year 7 students mixed together in the one classroom to form a single cohort. These students were generally taught by one or two subject teachers.
Parent Information Sessions	Information sessions hosted by secondary school staff to inform parents and students about the secondary school environment. These sessions included question and answer time.
Preparation for Secondary Literacy	Methods used by teachers to prepare students for the demands of secondary school literacy. These included structured reading, spelling and writing programs, daily literacy blocks, group work and integration.
Gain Knowledge of Students	Secondary teachers received information from primary school teachers about students. This included both the academic achievements and social characteristics of students.
Student Testing	This involved testing students on literacy based tests to obtain a measurement of student achievement levels. This testing occurred pre and/or post transition to secondary school.
Cater for Individual Needs	The differentiation of classroom tasks to cater for the different literacy capabilities of students in Year 6 and Year 7.
Talk about Secondary School	Year 6 or Year 7 teachers engaging in discussions with their students about secondary school. This consisted of informing students about what to expect at secondary school.
No Method of Preparation	This referred to teachers who did not do anything to prepare their students for the transition to secondary school.

As evident in Table 13, a number of methods were explained by the teachers, and patterns of similarity occurred in the teachers' responses in regards to two categories constructed during the process of thematic analysis (see Appendix J): facilitating effective transition in schools (Category 1) and facilitating effective transition in the classroom (Category 2). These patterns were summarised to identify the most common methods that primary, secondary and district school teachers were using in order to prepare their students for the transition phase. These are presented in Table 14.

Table 14

Primary, Secondary and District School Teachers' Methods of Transition Preparation

Methods	**% of Primary Teachers**	**% of Secondary Teachers**	**% of District Teachers**	**% of all teachers interviewed**
School Level				
Orientation Days	100% (5 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (19 of 19)
Support for Students at Risk	100% (5 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (19 of 19)
Transition Program	0 (0 if 5)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	74% (14 of 19)
Activity Days	60% (3 of 5)	57% (4 of 7)	0 (0 of 7)	37% (7 of 19)
Share/Collect Work Samples	0 (0 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	42% (3 of 7)	26% (5 of 19)
Composite Classes	60% (3 of 5)	14% (1 of 7)	57% (4 of 7)	42% (8 of 19)
Parent Information Sessions	0 (0 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	0 (0 of 7)	10% (2 of 19)
Classroom Level				
Preparation for Secondary Literacy	0 (0 of 5)	0 (0 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	37% (7 of 19)
Gain Knowledge of Students	0 (0 of 5)	71% (5 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	63% (12 of 19)
Student Testing	0 (0 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	0 (0 of 7)	10% (2 of 19)
Cater for Individual Needs	0 (0 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	71% (5 of 7)	36% (7 of 19)
Talk about Secondary School	80% (4 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	0 (0 of 7)	31% (6 of 19)
No Method of Preparation	60% (3 of 5)	42% (3 of 7)	14% (1 of 7)	36% (7 of 19)

Note. Primary Teachers: $N = 5$ Secondary Teachers: $N = 7$ District: Teachers: $N = 7$
Frequencies have been rounded to the nearest decimal place.

Table 14 reveals that the most common methods of transition preparation were orientation days, providing support for students at risk of underachievement, running transition programs and gaining knowledge of students. All 19 teachers interviewed reported the use of orientation days whereby students would visit their prospective secondary school to participate in activities, to familiarise themselves with the secondary environment and to meet future teachers and peers. Supporting students at risk was also reported by all 19 teachers, whereby additional support in the form of increased one-on-one literacy teaching or increased teacher's aide time was offered to students with special needs or learning difficulties. Although the use of transition programs was a common practice, this was only used by secondary and district school teachers. No primary school teachers reported that they had a transition program in place in their school to assist their students prepare for the move to Year 7. As evident in Table 14, methods of transition preparation utilised by the primary, secondary and district school teachers varied and this has been further explored below.

Primary school preparation.

Table 14 demonstrated that primary school teachers engaged in only a small number of transition preparation practices. Discussions with the primary teachers revealed that their role in preparing students for secondary school was passive, as their main function was to accommodate requests from secondary school teachers. The types of transition preparation practices used by the primary school teachers included hosting activity days and orientation days which were organised by secondary school staff, providing secondary teachers with information about students (including achievement levels and special needs), ensuring students achieved the required curriculum literacy skills by the end of Year 6, and talking to students about what to expect at secondary school.

The following extracts from two primary school teachers provide examples of the role primary school teachers played in transition preparation:

T4S4 We give them [the secondary school] advice about which students do and don't work well together and where they are at academically.

T1S3a They need to be literate, and that includes speaking, listening, reading as well as writing … they need to reach a certain level so they can cope with whatever is at high school. … I try to get their literacy levels up to the level where they feel confident about going to high school. … If we get them confident then I think this will help them.

As the above quotes demonstrate, transition preparation in the primary school years was predominantly based on providing support for students and ensuring they had basic skills before entering secondary school. However, the data also revealed that 60% (3 of 5) of primary school teachers did not do anything to prepare their students for secondary school: "We talk about what they might experience at high school, but I don't do anything specific to deal with teaching them about high school" (T23a). This lack of preparation in the primary school years may have contributed to the decline many students experienced upon entry into secondary school.

Although some of the primary school teachers indicated that they utilised a variety of transition preparation activities and programs in order to prepare their students for the move into Year 7, these activities and programs were run by the secondary school staff with minimal engagement from the primary school staff. As a result, the primary teachers reported that they had little or no input into the way students were prepared for transition, as one primary school teacher revealed: "Most of the things are organised by the high school. We just accommodate them, what they want" (T3S4).

Secondary school preparation.

Unlike the primary school teachers, the secondary school teachers had an active role in preparing students for transition. These teachers stated that it was their responsibility to design and organise transition programs, activities and events, and to contact the primary school teachers in regards to student information. Table 14 revealed that orientation days, transition programs and supporting students at risk were methods of transition preparation utilised by all secondary school teachers. In addition, the following preparation practices were reported:

- Gaining knowledge of students' achievement levels prior to entry into Year 7.
- Gaining knowledge of students who may have special needs.
- Running Activity Days on both the primary and the secondary school campuses. These involved secondary school staff and students organising and running activities for the Year 6 students, such a sports days, art and craft activities or cooking sessions.
- Collecting and sharing students' work samples with the primary school staff.
- Hosting parent information sessions.
- Conducting student testing. This involved testing students using literacy assessments to ascertain students' current reading, writing and spelling levels.
- Catering for the individual needs of students.
- Talking to students about the expectations of secondary school.

The following extract from one senior secondary teacher provides an example of the approach secondary teachers had to transition preparation:

T61b There is an explicit written up transition program that all teachers integrate and it's planned for as a team. We have a formal program that is structured where parents of Grade 6 students are invited in for an information evening. Students come in and talk about their transition into the school as well as key teachers are there to talk to parents. … All students who come to [school] are invited to a program where they come in once a week for six weeks in third term. They indicate their interest area – it can be computer game design, rock climbing, food catering – it varies from year to year. We take one primary school at a time to begin with, keep them separate, then all the schools come at once so they get a chance to meet their whole year group. We run some structured activities for them.

As the above extract reveals, the transition programs utilised by the secondary school teachers were diverse and structured, although the data revealed that methods of preparation were more focussed on preparing students for the physical and structural aspects of secondary school, rather than the academic demands of Year 7. The absence of preparation for secondary school literacy in transition programs may have been a key determinant for the declining literacy levels experienced by students who transitioned externally, particularly in regards to reading and comprehension achievement as measured by the *PAT-R*.

District school preparation.

Methods of transition preparation utilised by the district school teachers contained both differences and similarities to those used in primary and secondary schools. As the students in district schools were not required to move campus during transition, students' experiences of the transition into secondary school differed to those students who transitioned across

campuses. Discussions with the district teachers highlighted a number of ways in which their students were prepared for an internal transition:

- Orientation days were run to enable students to become familiar with a new part of their school environment, new teachers and new peers.
- Ensuring sufficient support was provided for students at risk was a priority.
- Transition programs were common practice; however, unlike the primary and secondary schools, the district school transition programs were designed in collaboration by both Year 6 and Year 7 district school staff.
- Year 6 district school teachers shared knowledge of their students with Year 7 district school teachers prior to and post transition. This involved regular discussions between Year 6 and Year 7 district school teachers about the current achievement levels of the students, identifying students who were underachieving in literacy, and testing students on their reading, spelling and writing skills prior to and post transition into Year 7.
- Diverse literacy programs were offered to cater for individual student needs. For example, one district school teacher revealed that her school used a school wide literacy program, the Carol Christensen Program (Christensen, 2006), which provided a structured approach to teaching students higher levels of reading and spelling through teaching students to blend letter-sound correspondences to work out unfamiliar words, building students' sight/word vocabularies and engaging students with texts. The program was based on a structured approach and therefore students of all literacy abilities have been found to benefit from this program, even those diagnosed with dyslexia (University of Queensland, 2013).
- Year 6 and Year 7 district school teachers shared and collected work samples.

- Catch-up programs for students who found the demands of Year 7 literacy difficult were offered. These programs were conducted by the school's literacy support staff and consisted of students leaving their classroom for a period of time (45 – 60 minutes) to work in a literacy support classroom. This room was dedicated to assisting students who were underachieving in literacy. Class groups in literacy support were reported to be small, with no more than 10 students at a time. Literacy support sessions ranged from 2 to 4 per week. For those students who did not attend these literacy support classes, the classroom teacher would provide extra assistance in the classroom through differentiated learning tasks.
- Students were grouped into Year 6/7 composite classes (two year levels within the one classroom) based on student enrolments. These classes were taught by either one or two classroom teachers.

The structure of district schools, whereby students did not move campus, resulted in the perception that it was easy to promote and prepare students for a more "seamless" transition into Year 7. This was due to students already being familiar with the school environment, teachers already having knowledge of students and their needs prior to Year 7, and the opportunity for frequent collaboration between Year 7 and Year 7 teachers in the same school, under the direction of the same school leadership team. The following extracts from the interview data present examples of the way district school teachers prepared their students for transition:

T10S6 The Grade 6s and Grade 7s are together for everything – we stick to the middle school model. … The 6/7 model exists here as students do find it hard to transition, so the Grade 6s come over and are mentored by the Grade 7s and then, by the time they get to Grade 7, they are ready for high school. I think it

works well … bit more of a slower process than going straight from one school to the next.

T14S7 We have the grades together so the transition is very easy. It is easy to see teachers and pass information back and forth. We have info about running records online – the teacher can log in and find out what level students are at. It is changed regularly and gives the teachers a bit of info to start with. With the composite class the transition is easier. I think it's good as it gives opportunity for the high level students to try harder work that is at the Grade 7 level. I've always liked the composite classes because of that reason: there is a mix of activities across a broad range.

T15S7 Environment, teacher personnel and student body all mix really well here. [They are] mixing with the same students and teachers here so it is not strange for them.

Discussions with the teachers in each of the three school types revealed there was variability in the way teachers prepared their students for transition. For separate campus schools, where the students physically moved from a primary school campus to a new secondary school campus, primary school teachers played a more passive role, whereas the secondary teachers were the more active facilitators of the transition preparation for the students. Even so, the methods utilised by the secondary school teachers were more focused on the structural and procedural demands of secondary school rather than understanding the ongoing literacy needs of the students. Transition into these new school locations could be described more as an orientation to secondary school, where the organisation of the secondary school, its expectations, and the structure of the secondary program were the critical focuses. As such, such programs could be regarded as short term and academically

“shallow”. District school teachers also utilised a number of similar practices to those used in the primary and secondary schools and, because students did not move campus during transition, many of the disruptions during the transition phase that occurred for students shifting from primary to secondary schools were not as prominent in the district schools. The students in the district schools had a stronger understanding of the whole school structure, and had less social and friendship adjustment, as they transitioned into secondary school as an established social cohort of students with a well-established peer friendship network. The evidence from the interviews was that there was more informal and formal transfer of student academic progress information occurring between the Year 6 and Year 7 teachers in the district schools, with the school administration more engaged with organising the teachers to share program strategies from the primary school classrooms into secondary school classrooms. As a consequence, the transition in the district schools could be described as more long-term, more engaging of both the primary school and the secondary school teachers and, as such, demonstrated more depth of academic and programming focus in its practice. This may have contributed to the ongoing success many district school students experienced in their reading and comprehension achievement, as shown by their *PAT-R* scores and their and *SWST* achievement during their first year of secondary school.

Teachers’ suggestions for enhancing transition.

Research Question 6: What methods do teachers perceive as being most necessary for the promotion of literacy development in adolescent learners across the transition phase?

Three key themes emerged from the teacher data in regards to teachers’ perceptions for how the literacy development of students could be improved across the transition phase:

Communication.

For the context of this research, communication was defined as the amount of discussion, contact or collaboration that primary school staff had with secondary school staff in terms of preparing students for transition and transition into secondary school literacy programs. The interview data revealed a common pattern amongst the teacher responses, whereby 74% (14 of 19) of teachers, which included some district school teachers, felt that the level of communication between Year 6 and Year 7 staff was not adequate to enable them to prepare students for the transition into secondary school literacy programs, and therefore these teachers believed that communication levels needed to be increased. See Table 15.

Table 15

Teachers' Suggestions for Improving Transition and Percentage of Communication Used

Suggestions	**% of primary teachers**	**% of secondary teachers**	**% of district teachers**	**% of all teachers interviewed**
Teacher Suggestions				
Increase Communication	100% (5 of 5)	71% (5 of 7)	57% (4 of 7)	74% (14 of 19)
Increase School Visits	100% (5 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	14% (1 of 7)	42% (8 of 19)
Type of Communication				
Transition Program	0 (0 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	74% (14 of 19)
Literacy Communication	40% (2 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	58% (11 of 19)
No Communication	40% (2 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	71% (5 of 7)	31% (6 of 19)

Note. Primary Teachers: $N = 5$ Secondary Teachers: $N = 7$ District Teachers: $N = 7$
Frequencies have been rounded to the nearest decimal place

Table 15 demonstrates that all of the primary school teachers and 71% (5 of 7) of the secondary school teachers reported that an increase in communication was needed between

primary school and secondary school staff in regards to transition. In comparison, an increase in communication was identified as an area of need by only 57% (4 of 7) of district school teachers. One finding of particular interest was that 31% (6 of 19) of the teachers interviewed revealed that no communication took place between Year 6 and Year 7 teaching staff during transition.

The teachers revealed that, where communication did take place, common methods included:

- Sharing and having knowledge of primary and secondary literacy programs.
- Sharing knowledge of students' current achievement levels as they entered Year 7.
- Collaboration between Year 6 and Year 7 staff.
- Professional development opportunities involving both primary and secondary school staff. These consisted of the primary school teachers going to the secondary schools to participate in professional learning sessions. These sessions were either conducted by the secondary school teachers to demonstrate or share a particular literacy program (for example, Writer's Notebook) or a representative from the Department of Education would conduct a professional development session for all teachers.
- Development and implementation of transition programs.

Although these methods of communication occurred between schools to some extent, all primary school teachers and 71% (5 of 7) of secondary school teachers reported that, in order to prepare students for transition, communication between schools and teaching staff needed to be improved. There was also a desire to engage in this communication on a more regular basis to ensure students were adequately supported and better prepared for secondary school literacy demands. What follows is a discussion of the level of communication that occurred in each of the three school types: primary, secondary and district schools. The way

communication was engaged in by teachers within these schools will be explored with supporting examples from the interviews.

Primary to secondary communication.

An increased need for communication was highlighted as a particular concern for primary school teachers, whereby all teachers interviewed stated that an increase in communication was needed with secondary school staff in order to enable them to adequately prepare students for secondary school. Discussions with the primary school teachers indicated that communication was facilitated and dominated by the secondary schools. The primary school teachers described their own communication with the secondary school staff to be responsive: communication made with secondary staff was "one-way" sharing, characterised by unequal partnerships between primary and secondary school teachers, with minimal value or understanding of each other's work. Communication was predominantly in response to requests from the secondary schools in relation to:

- Student achievement records.
- Participation in transition activity days and orientation days.
- Professional learning days.
- Programs for students at risk upon entry into secondary school.

The interviews revealed that only 40% (2 of 5) of primary school teachers engaged in communication with secondary school staff in regards to literacy practices and programs used for secondary literacy instruction and, as a result, many primary school teachers felt that they were not being informed of the literacy practices used in secondary schools. Therefore, communication was not sufficient in enabling the primary school teachers to prepare their

students for secondary school literacy. This is evident in discussion with two primary school teachers:

T4S4: Most of the things are organised by the high school. We just accommodate them and what they want.

T2S3a: I don't do anything specifically to deal with teaching them [students] about high school … I don't know what they [primary teachers] do.

Secondary to primary communication.

Unlike the primary school teachers, who felt that communication was insufficient with the secondary staff, the data revealed that while 71% (5 of 7) of secondary teachers stated that an increase in communication would contribute to better preparation for transition, many were also positive about the level of communication they maintained with primary schools. These teachers were active facilitators of communication and felt that they engaged in a substantial level of communication in order to support students during transition. Communication between secondary and primary teachers consisted of:

- Contacting primary teachers about students who may have special needs.
- Seeking information about students for the creation of friendship groups and class placements.
- Contacting primary schools about running transition activities and orientation days.
- Inviting primary teachers to participate in professional development courses.
- Inviting primary teachers to view the literacy programs used in secondary classrooms.

The secondary school teacher interview data revealed a conscious effort by the secondary school teachers to maintain communication with the primary school staff.

However, as mentioned above, opportunities for communication were dominated by the secondary school staff with minimal or no contribution from the primary school teachers. The following examples from two secondary school teachers provide examples of such communication:

T6S1b: K will contact the primary school and say "are there any students to worry about?" … [We] contact Grade 6 teachers to enquire about suggestions on class placement, who would students work well with and who would help them make a good transition to make sure they don't feel anxious. Parents are also contacted by mail. … Also, [we] get information on students' general results, particularly numeracy and literacy, social skills, but also … to find out about any strengths or weaknesses and to find out interests. [We] contact one primary school at a time.

T9S5b [We need] more communication between the schools or [to] have someone that can act as a relay between the schools, show us what their literacy program is. What areas they have focused on would make the transition a little bit easier. Need more time available.

T18S3b We have a national partnership for Grades 5-8 transition to do with literacy. As part of this, we liaise with the primary school quite closely with our literacy practices.

As the above examples demonstrate, there was variance in the way communication occurred in the secondary schools. While all secondary school teachers communicated in terms of transition programs, only 28% of these teachers stated that communication occurred with the primary school teachers in regards to literacy practices.

District school communication.

Communication was also identified as an area of need by both Year 6 and Year 7 district school teachers. As with Year 6 and Year 7 teachers from separate campus schools, communication was important to the district school teachers, with 57% (4 of 7) stating that communication was an essential tool for ensuring effective curriculum transition. The district school teachers believed that an increase in communication between primary and secondary school staff would assist them in preparing students for secondary school. While communication was reported to occur in a number of ways within district schools, just over half (57%) of district school teachers identified that greater communication was still needed to prepare students for secondary school and secondary literacy programs. The type of communication reported by the district school teachers consisted of:

- Whole school staff meetings.
- Whole school planning.
- Specialised middle school planning sessions.
- Professional learning sessions, whereby primary school and secondary school teachers were given the opportunity to collaborate in regards to the literacy programs and practices used in their classrooms.
- Collaboration between primary and secondary school staff regarding transition programs.
- Collaboration between primary and secondary school staff regarding literacy programs.

The following examples below provide illustrations of the type of communication practices engaged in at the district schools:

T12S2 [We have] whole school meetings to see if we are on the same page. … We have meetings as a middle school [Year] 5 to [Year] 8, … we make sure we're teaching the things they need in literacy when they go into Grade 7 and 8. … We're in contact with one another, Grade 6 and Grade 7 teachers, once a week … [and] do professional learning together to make sure we're on the same page on what we are teaching them and preparing them for transition.

T15S7 There is a lot of mixing. … I think that's important for transition as the students are familiar with the school, the environment, students and teachers. All these things really support the notion of a good transition.

As these examples demonstrate, the shared planning, structural organisation and collaboration that took place between teachers at the district schools enabled a meaningful and high level of communication to occur. Within these schools, the students were also given opportunities to communicate with their older and younger peers and, importantly, their potential Year 7 teachers. This was explained by a senior district school teacher: "The grade 5s are invited to the 6/7 options this term to enable them to mix with the teachers and the students so it [secondary school] is not so strange for them". This level of communication enabled students to not only become familiar with the secondary school environment, but also with the literacy practices used in Year 7. Such practices were not reported by the primary and secondary school teachers from separate campus schools and this may have been a contributing factor to the decline in test scores many students who transition externally experienced.

Curriculum continuity and awareness.

The fourth theme developed from the interview data was curriculum continuity and awareness. This theme was identified through an analysis of teachers' suggestions for enhancing the transition experience for students. The theme emerged from Category 2, teachers' suggestions for enhancing transition (Appendix J), whereby consistency in teachers' responses led to a pattern indicating that curriculum continuity and awareness was an area of concern, with 58% (11 of 19) of teachers stating that greater familiarity with the primary/secondary school curricula would enable them to better prepare students for the transition to secondary school (See Table 17). Table 16 provides a description of the suggestions proposed by the primary, secondary and district school teachers to enhance the transition experience.

Table 16

Description of Teachers' Suggestions for Enhancing the Transition Experience

Suggestions and Current Approaches	**Description**
Consistent Programs	The same spelling, reading and writing program used in both primary and secondary schools.
Curriculum Familiarity	Year 6 and Year 7 teachers being aware of the English/literacy curriculum taught in each year level. For example, Year 6 teachers having knowledge of the Year 7 English/literacy curriculum and Year 7 teachers having knowledge of the Year 6 English/literacy curriculum.
Awareness	The awareness Year 6 and Year 7 teachers had of the literacy programs and practices used in each other's classrooms and schools.
Curriculum Continuity	The continuity of the English/literacy curriculum content between Year 6 and Year 7, whereby Year 7 teachers would follow on and expand on the knowledge and skills students learnt in Year 6.
No Continuity	No continuity between the English/literacy curriculum in Year 6 and Year 7, whereby Year 6 and Year 7 teachers were not aware of the content taught in each other's year groups.

As Table 16 demonstrates, there were some key areas that the primary, secondary and district school teachers felt were essential for enhancing students' experience of transition. These suggestions and approaches are summarised in Table 17.

Table 17

Teachers' Suggestions for Improving Current Approaches for Enhancing the Transition Experience

Suggestions and Approaches	**% of 5 primary teachers**	**% of 7 secondary teachers**	**% of 7 district teachers**	**% of all teachers interviewed**
Teacher Suggestions				
Consistent Programs	100% (5 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	57% (4 of 7)	74% (14 0f 19)
Curriculum Familiarity	100% (5 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	14% (1 of 7)	58% (11 of 19)
Increase Awareness	100% (5 of 5)	42% (3 of 7)	0 (0 of 7)	42% (8 of 19)
Current Approaches				
Curriculum Continuity	0 (0 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	71% (5 of 7)	36% (7 of 19)
No Continuity	100% (5 of 5)	71% (5 of 7)	28% (2 of 7)	63% (12 of 19)

Note. Primary Teachers: *N* = 5 Secondary Teachers: *N* = 7 District Teachers: *N* = 7
Frequencies have been rounded to the nearest decimal place

As Table 17 demonstrates, teachers' suggestions for enhancing the transition experience for students included consistent programs (consisting of reading, spelling and writing programs that continued from Year 6 to Year 7) being taught at both the primary and secondary school levels, familiarity with both the primary and secondary school curriculum and an awareness of the programs and practices being used in both Year 6 and Year 7, to ensure a seamless transition from one year into the next. Table 17 also reveals that, for 63% of teachers, maintaining a continuous approach to the curriculum was not a common practice at their school, with many teachers tending to focus solely on the curriculum corresponding

to their own year level. The need for curriculum continuity and awareness is discussed in detail below with supporting examples from the interviews.

Primary to secondary curriculum continuity and awareness.

The concern regarding curriculum continuity was most prevalent amongst the primary and secondary school teachers, with all primary school teachers and 71% (5 of 7) of secondary school teachers stating that there was no continuity between the two schools and, as a result, primary and secondary school teachers were unaware of each other's programs, practices and curriculum requirements. Discussions with the primary school teachers revealed that 100% believed that having consistent literacy programs and a greater familiarity with the secondary school curriculum would enable them to better prepare students for secondary school. All primary school teachers also felt that having an increased awareness of the programs and practices used at secondary school was essential. Interestingly, curriculum continuity was not a priority for the primary school teachers and their main focus was to ensure students achieved grade level by the end of Year 6. The methods of literacy instruction used by the primary school teachers were not designed to specifically align with the Year 7 curriculum. A consistent pattern in the data revealed that the primary school teachers were not aware of the Year 7 curriculum, and this lack of awareness meant that the primary school teachers were not able to ensure continuity from Year 6 into Year 7. This was evident in the following excerpts from discussions with primary school teachers:

T1S3a I'm not really aware of what happens with this [Year 7 curriculum]. I don't really look at Grade 7. I concentrate on getting them to Grade 6 level.

T2S3a: I don't know what they do in English in high school. I've heard they use a curriculum model … but I haven't seen it.

Similarly, a lack of curriculum continuity and awareness was also identified as a main area of concern for the secondary teachers, who felt that they were ill-informed about the practices and programs utilised in the primary school setting and that maintaining continuity was therefore difficult. The main areas of need identified by the secondary school teachers for supporting students during transition were consistent programs between primary and secondary schools, and greater familiarity with the primary school curriculum. In addition, having an understanding of the capabilities of students who were entering secondary school was important for secondary school teachers, in order to prepare students for the demands of Year 7, as outlined by one secondary school teacher:

T7S5b: Show us what their literacy program is and where all their kids are at. Finding time to be able to meet is hard. … [It's] hard to understand what the feeder school literacy program is – there are five [feeder schools]. What areas they have focused on would make the transition a little bit easier.

The data highlighted that only 28% (2 of 7) of secondary school teachers had a program in place designed to promote curriculum continuity and align with the practices and programs used in the primary schools. This is further explored in the extract below from one secondary school teacher that explains how primary and secondary school teachers would work together to ensure continuity across the two campuses:

T19S3b We meet every so often and exchange our ideas, making sure we have a unified approach and continuity. We have had the primary school teachers come to visit the Grade 7 students and watch us do the program and the students love this. They do a tour group and show the teachers the programs

they are doing. We try to keep some lessons quite similar so that it's not such a big change when they get to high school.

Evidently, efforts have been made between the primary and secondary school teachers from separate campus schools to ensure curriculum continuity occurred. By having the same programs used consistently between the two campuses, the primary and secondary school teachers were able to align their literacy practices and programs to support student transition into secondary school literacy and, therefore, enhance their transition experience.

Curriculum continuity in district schools.

Discussions with the district school teachers revealed that, unlike the off-campus transitioning schools, curriculum continuity was utilised as a method to ensure that a seamless transition occurred from Year 6 into Year 7. Although curriculum continuity was present in the district schools, some district school teachers reported this could be further improved. The data noted that 57% (4 of 7) of district school teachers stated that their school needed greater consistency in terms of literacy programs, and 14% (1 of 7) stated that they needed more familiarity with the primary/secondary curriculum. All district school teachers believed they had sufficient awareness of the programs and practices used in Year 6 and Year 7 classrooms and, unlike the primary and secondary school teachers from separate campus schools, 71% (5 of 7) of the district school teachers reported curriculum continuity as a method utilised within their school.

The following comments made by district school teachers provide examples for the way curriculum continuity was implemented in the district schools:

T15S7 A lot of planning that we are doing is with common practice,

particularly in our literacy planning. That supports the kids, and they don't have to learn a new curriculum. They've got a natural flow through … the environment, personnel and curriculum.

T13S2 We have a K-10 scope and sequence … we have planning time together. [It's] very much team planning.

T17S7 We have similar programs in the primary and middle school, such as the Reader's and Writer's Notebook so we just build on what they've done with these. It's the same with the spelling program.

The above comments reveal that most district school teachers were focussed on, and dedicated to, ensuring the curriculum was continuous during the transition phase to ensure that the primary school students experienced a smooth transition into Year 7 literacy. Even so, a small number of district school teachers also reported that the transition program could be enhanced. This was explained by two district school teachers:

T11S6 A whole school literacy program would be good: scope and sequence and more information from the current teacher in Grade 6 about what's been covered, strengths and weaknesses of the students, about what they have and haven't been learning.

T10S6 I would want to have collaboration from the Grade 6 teachers so we know where students are at. We do testing to see where we are at, but trying to plan the sequential things that move on from that is hard.

The concern regarding curriculum continuity was most prevalent amongst teachers from separate campus schools. As the above quote demonstrated, having sufficient

knowledge of the curriculum across the school years was an important area of need for both students and teachers. This suggested that primary and secondary school teachers found it more difficult to maintain curriculum continuity than teachers from the district schools. The lack of curriculum continuity and curriculum awareness could be a valid contributing factor for the decline in students' reading test scores across the transition phase. For the primary school teachers, the lack of familiarity with the secondary school curriculum could lead to students being inadequately prepared for the literacy demands of secondary school, and some students may enter secondary school without the necessary skills to read, write and spell at the expected levels.

It is important to note that the secondary school literacy program had a stronger focus on reading a set novel where secondary school students, as a class, had to read this novel at home and come prepared to discuss its characters and its themes in class. This extended reading had a strong discourse focus, where the author's intentions in structuring the text were reviewed. As part of the Australian Curriculum (2013) requirements, students in Year 7 are expected to engage with and read a large piece of literature, such as a novel. In comparison, interpreting an extended piece of reading such as whole class set novel was not a common practice in Year 6 primary school classrooms. In the Year 6 classrooms, extended reading focused more on individual students selecting a book of their own choice to read, with limited use of a discourse analysis occurring on this book. When primary school teachers worked with text as a whole classroom activity, the text was typically an extract passage from a book, and the reading of this passage was scaffolded by the teacher, supporting the students to jointly read and understand the text. In the Year 7 classrooms in the district schools, extended reading practice was initially more like the primary school practice of joint reading and interpretation of short passages from books, and the use of interpreting and analysing a novel or book was postponed to later in the year.

The indications are that secondary school teachers make assumptions that the students coming from the primary school were ready for extended independent reading of a novel and the students were able to participate in a discourse about that novel. The issue is that, based on the teachers in this study, extended independent reading of a novel and an interpretative discourse on that novel was not a common feature of the Year 6 literacy program. It could be that both the primary and the second school teachers need to review their practices associated with extended independent reading and the readiness for the students coming into secondary school to engage in a discourse analysis about a novel and how it is constructed. The evidence is that both primary and secondary school teachers need to be adequately informed of the primary school and secondary school literacy practices and its curriculum, and to understand the readiness of the students to advance in their literacy proficiency. If both cohorts of teachers are ill-informed in regards to the capabilities of their students, both sets of teachers are at risk of repeating work already previously taught, and are failing to prepare students for the next stage of their literacy development. Alternatively, the teachers are unnecessarily delaying the advancement of the students in their literacy development because of poor preparation and/or lower expectations.

In terms of writing, however, extended writing activities were a common practice across both district and secondary schools, with secondary school teachers providing classroom time for the Year 7 students to write in different forms (such as persuasive essays, narratives, information reports) and to discuss their writing within the teacher and their peers. A common feature of the writing practice in the Year 6 and Year 7 classrooms was an emphasis on persuasive writing at the time of data collection. This focus on persuasive writing was reported to reflect a directive with in the Tasmanian Department of Education to all schools, noting that Year 7 students in Tasmania had not performed well at this task in the recent national literacy tests associated with the *NAPLAN* testing. Such a finding may help to

explain why spelling performance showed a steady improvement from Year 6 to Year 7 across the data.

Teacher support.

In addition to increased communication and curriculum continuity and awareness, the teacher interview data revealed that increasing teacher support would enhance teachers' abilities to prepare students for transition. This theme was developed from two categories (see Appendix J): teacher suggestions for enhancing literacy (Category 3) and support and resources (Category 10), whereby there was a common belief amongst teachers that adequate teacher support and appropriate teaching resources were vital for promoting adolescent literacy development during the transition phase. See Table 18.

Table 18

Teacher's Suggestions for Enhancing the Transition Experience for Students

Suggestions	% of primary teachers	% of secondary teachers	% of district teachers	% of teachers interviewed
Teachers' Suggestions				
Regular Staff Meetings	100% (5 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (19 of 19)
Share Resources	100% (5 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (19 of 19)
Identify Areas for Improvement	100% (5 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (19 of 19)
Collegial Support	100% (5 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (19 of 19)
Professional Development	100% (5 of 5)	57% (4 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	84% (16 of 19)
Support and Resources				
Increase Teachers' Aide Time	100% (5 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (19 of 19)
Increase Qualified Support Staff	60% (3 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	0 (0 of 7)	26% (5 of 19)
Increase Resources	100% (5 of 5)	71% (5 of 7)	71% (5 of 7)	79% (15 of 19)
Increase Planning Time	100% (5 of 5)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (7 of 7)	100% (19 of 19)
Smaller Class Sizes	60% (3 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	14% (1 of 7)	31% (6 of 19)
Increase Access to Technology	40% (2 of 5)	28% (2 of 7)	28% (2 of 7)	31% (6 of 19)

Note. Primary Teachers: $N = 5$ Secondary Teachers: $N = 7$ District Teachers: $N = 7$
Frequencies have been rounded to the nearest decimal place

As Table 18 highlights, many of the suggestions proposed by teachers to promote literacy development in their students were consistent across primary, secondary and district school teachers. All of the teachers interviewed agreed that regular staff meetings, sharing resources, identifying areas for student improvement and collegial support were vital methods for assisting the promotion of literacy development across transition. Professional development opportunities were also reported by 84% (16 of 19) of teachers as an important and valuable part of their practice. Table 18 also reveals that, in regards to resources, all teachers felt that an increase in teacher's aide time and planning time would better enable them to provide students with adequate literacy support. An increase in resources was also reported by 79% (15 of 19) of teachers who reported that appropriate resources were vital for promoting literacy development. The major pattern constituting this theme was the belief that an increase in teacher support would enable teachers to better promote literacy development in their classrooms and across the transition phase.

Teacher's aides/support teachers.

All of the primary, secondary and district school teachers interviewed stated that an increase in teacher's aide/support teacher time was needed to enable them to better prepare students for secondary school literacy. The primary and secondary school teachers reported that insufficient teacher's aide and support teacher time was due to a lack of funding, and only 28% (2 of 7) of secondary school teachers stated that their school had a qualified literacy support teacher (this was a teacher employed by the school to work with underachieving students, either in small groups or on a one-on-one basis. The role of the literacy support teacher was to design and coordinate the school's literacy programs, and to provide assistance to students who were at risk of failure in literacy, through additional literacy support). Teacher's aide time was predominantly allocated to students with a specific disability or

behaviour management problems. If teacher's aide time was available, priority was given to students who were finding the demands of school difficult. In comparison, the district school teachers reported a larger amount of teacher's aide/teacher support time than the primary and secondary school teachers. All district schools had a qualified literacy support teacher who was in charge of the literacy programs run at the school, but even so, many of the district school teachers noted that extra student and teacher support was still necessary, as one district school teacher explained:

T12S2 It would be better if the [Year] 7s had more one-on-one … It's brilliant having other people around … It can be hard to manage with one teacher … The aide coming in is a huge help.

A number of teachers across the three school types indicated the importance of additional teacher's aide/teacher support time from appropriately skilled people. Some comments from the primary, secondary and district school teachers illustrate this, and are presented below:

T13a It's a bad time to be asking, because support is normally really good [and] has been good in the past, but this term we have run out of money and the support teachers do relief … so my kids haven't got any support really this term. … It's been really inconsistent as well … it's been a real concern for a lot of teachers this year, that lack of support. (Primary school teacher)

T18S3b I'd like to see a dedicated literacy support person, not a teacher's aide. A trained person who can be in all classes all of the time. [We don't have] a specific person. I'm doing it, but also doing other things so it is not enough. (Secondary school teacher)

T85b [There is] not as much [support] as we would like … As far as teaching goes, another staff member to work with our class … during literacy, to break the classes into smaller groups. … We have some aide time, but not much and we never know if they will be there or not, they just show up. If you had the guarantee of the availability of someone that would help. (District school teacher)

Time and resources.

The second area highlighted by all teachers, as necessary for improving student transition, was the need for increased time and appropriate teaching and learning resources. Discussions with the teachers identified that, within each of the three school types, all teachers explained that they did not have sufficient time to prepare their students for the transition into secondary school and for the new demands associated with secondary literacy programs and expectations. Also, 84% (16 of 19) of teachers stated that ongoing professional development sessions were a valuable and necessary resource, and assisted them in promoting student learning. Increases in the amount of allocated time for planning, literacy preparation and transition preparation were reported by all teachers as an area of need in order to meet the requirements of their students during the transition phase. Increased access to highly engaging teaching resources was also highlighted by all teachers, with a particular emphasis on levelled reading books (books catering for students at different reading levels), which would appeal to students, as well as an increased amount of technology in the classroom. Secondary and district school teachers highlighted a particular need for appropriate resources which aligned with students' age, maturity level, reading level and interests, as these teachers felt that the current levelled reading books were

designed for the primary school students and not sufficient in promoting literacy development in Year 7.

The following excerpts from the interview data emphasise these findings and enable an insight into the comments made by teachers regarding the importance of time and appropriate resources. When the teachers were asked what they perceived as being the most necessary resource for the promotion of literacy development across the transition phase, the following was reported from two secondary teachers and one district school teacher:

T61b More planning time, designated time to plan together …we just don't have the time to share resources …we need more time.

T95b I'd like a lot more good literature. Also, computer literacy – one [computer] per student – and then we would be able to do a lot more. … More guided reading books for boys in particular would be good. They end up reading the ones they've read since Grade 3 in independent reading.

T17S7 If I had more time, I would do a lot more theme work with my class. For resources, more levelled specific texts that are not outdated and more books for the kids to read that are not little kid's books.

Regardless of the whether teachers taught in primary, secondary or district schools, all teachers indicated that more teacher support was vital for their teaching practices. Teachers' aides, teacher support staff, appropriate resources and an increase in planning time were essential areas of need highlighted by the teachers, who stated that sufficient support in these areas would enable them to promote adolescent literacy development during the transition phase, and to ensure students were adequately prepared for the transition to secondary school.

Summary of Teacher Data

Responses from the primary and secondary teachers revealed that there was a lack of consistency between the types of literacy programs and practices used in primary and secondary schools. The results revealed that minimal communication existed between primary school and secondary school staff in regards to transition preparation, literacy programs and literacy practices. As a result, a lack of curriculum continuity and awareness existed between the teachers from primary and secondary schools. In comparison, literacy practices and programs were consistent between district school teachers, whereby district schools utilised a whole school approach for literacy teaching. In the district school, methods of transition preparation were designed in collaboration by Year 6 and Year 7 staff, and these teachers reported higher levels of communication than the primary and secondary school teachers from separate campus schools. The literacy focus in the secondary schools had a stronger emphasis on discourse analysis of extended independent reading of set novels, with this practice less common in the primary schools and postponed more in the district schools. Extended writing activities were a common practice across both district and secondary schools, with a focus on persuasive writing a consistent feature of the Year 6 and Year 7 writing programs for the schools involved in this study. All teachers in the study stated that teacher support was a significant area of need. The three main suggestions proposed by teachers to improve the transition phase for students were to increase communication, increase curriculum continuity and increase teacher support. These are explored in depth in Chapter 5, Discussion.

Students' test achievement and teachers' practice.

The collected data were analysed from two methodological approaches, quantitative and qualitative. In order to identify relationships between the findings from these approaches, a summary of the findings for each of the participating schools, including type of transition, SES, as well as their relationship with each of the identified themes is presented below. Presenting the results in this manner enabled further insights into to data to determine whether relationships existed between student performance across the transition phase and the types of classroom practices and programs used by Year 6 and Year 7 teachers.

Table 19 presents a summary of the research findings of student test achievement and the main themes that arose from analysis of the teacher data:

Table 19

Summary of Students' Test Achievement and Teacher Practice for Individual Schools

School Transition	Test Result *PAT-R*	*SWST*	Type of Transition	SES	Themes Communication	Curriculum Awareness	Teacher Support	Literacy Program	Transition Program
School 1a – 1b	↓	↓	E	H, M	-	-	-	-	-
School 2	↓	↑	I	H	High	✓	Medium	✓	✓
School 3a – 3b	↓	↑	E	L, L	Low	×	Low, Medium	✓	✓
School 4 – 1b	↓	↑	E	L, M	Low	×	High, Medium	×	✓
School 5a – 5b	↓	↓	E	L, L	Low	×	Low	×	✓
School 6	↓	↓	I	M	Low	×	Low	×	✓
School 7	↑	↑	I	M	Low	✓	High	✓	✓

Note. Literacy program refers to programs and practices that were used across year 6 and year 7
E = external transition; I = internal transition; L = low SES; M = middle SES; H = high SES
↓ = decrease in test scores; ↑ = increase test scores
- = qualitative data was unable to be obtained from this school

As can be seen in Table 19, students from only one school, School 7, experienced increases in both *PAT-R* and *SWST* achievement. This was also the only school whereby teachers utilised programs and/or practices within each of the five themes (communication, curriculum continuity and awareness, teacher support, preparing for transition, preparing for secondary school literacy), and had both a literacy and a transition program. Students from schools with low levels of communication and minimal awareness of the Year 6 or Year 7 curriculum (School 3a-3b, School 4-1b, School 5a- 5b and School 6) experienced greater declines in their *PAT-R* achievement. Teachers from five of the participating schools (4-1b, School 5a- 5b and School 6) also reported that their literacy programs, particularly reading programs, were not designed to effectively fit the literacy learning needs of many of the students. Curriculum awareness was reported as being low by teachers from the separate campus schools, as was communication. In addition, the following patterns emerged between the two data sets:

- School 2, an internal transitioning school, was the only other school in the study to report a combination of each of the five variables. However, while students from School 2 increased in terms of spelling *SWST* achievement, these students experienced some decline in their reading *PAT-R* achievement.
- All students who transitioned externally experienced a decline in their *PAT-R* achievement, with many of these students showing a significant reduction in their reading and reading comprehension from Year 6 to Year 7.
- Students from two out of three district schools, where their transition occurred internally, experienced an increase in reading (School 7) or spelling (School 2) achievement.

- Communication between primary and secondary schools was reported as low by teachers from all separate campus schools.
- Curriculum continuity and awareness was poorly used by teachers in any separate campus school as a method to design the Year 7 literacy program.
- Teachers from all schools situated in low SES areas reported minimal communication, minimal curriculum continuity and awareness. and low or medium teacher support associated with Year 7 students' transition to secondary school.
- Teachers from two low SES schools (School 4/1b, School 5a/5b) reported minimal use of a specific literacy program. Students from these schools experienced declines in their *PAT-R* achievement.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings for each of the six research questions. Statistical analysis of students' test scores at the overall school level revealed that student test performance on the *PAT-R* significantly declined during the transition phase, and that students' *SWST* performance remained steady. It was also found that students who transitioned externally experienced significantly greater declines in their *PAT-R* and *SWST* performance across transition than students who transitioned internally and were located in the district schools. The results also identified that students from schools situated in high SES areas performed significantly better on the *PAT-R* and *SWST* post transition than students from lower SES schools.

Analysis of students' test results at the individual school level revealed a significant decrease in *PAT-R* achievement across transition for four schools. Students from only one school experienced an increase in *PAT-R* scores. In regards to *SWST*, the results revealed that,

while four schools did increase in terms of their spelling achievement, these increases were not significant at the individual school level.

Thematic analyses of primary, secondary and district school teachers' programs, practices and perceptions of transition revealed five key themes in regards to the type of literacy practices and programs teachers were using in their classrooms to promote literacy achievement during the transition phase. The constructed themes were: preparing for literacy, preparing for transition, communication, curriculum continuity and awareness, and teacher support. Each theme highlighted the current teaching programs and practices teachers were using in order to prepare their students for the transition phase, as well as identifying teachers' perceptions of the areas that needed to be addressed in order to improve the transition phase for students.

This chapter concluded with a summary of students' test achievement and teacher practice, whereby student test achievement across individual schools was identified in relation to each of the constructed themes. The following chapter, Chapter 5: Discussion, provides a detailed discussion of the research findings and situates these findings within the current body of literature, in addition to outlining implications.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings from the student test data and the teacher interview data, and revealed a number of important findings in regards to the impact the transition phase can have on adolescent students' reading and spelling achievement. Insights into the types of programs and practices primary, secondary and district school teachers were using in their classrooms were also explored. This chapter expands upon the results and presents a detailed discussion of the research findings. Under the guidance of each research question, this chapter reviews the results, situates these results within the existing body of literature and outlines the contributions the present results make to the research field. A discussion of the implications of this research is also included.

The research questions have been used deliberately to act as a framework for the organisation of this chapter, and each question has been addressed separately to enable a comprehensive understanding of the different variables that were explored in the study. The findings for the research questions have been discussed in the same order they appeared in the previous chapter, including individual school and overall school data. The chapter has been structured in this manner to enable the reader to easily navigate through the discussion and to make links to the research findings.

Student *PAT-R* and *SWST* Achievement across Transition

Research Question 1: Does the transition from primary school into secondary school have an impact upon adolescent students' literacy achievement as determined by PAT-R and SWST scores?

The analysis of the overall student sample revealed that the transition phase had a significant impact upon adolescent students' reading achievement, whereby students experienced a significant decline in their *PAT-R* scores as they transitioned from Year 6 to Year 7. The individual school level analysis demonstrated that the level of *PAT-R* decline varied amongst the participating secondary schools, but declines in reading were less evident in the district schools. Spelling, in contrast, did not demonstrate a decline from Year 6 to Year 7, but a steady improvement.

These research findings both support and challenge the existing literature surrounding adolescents' achievement and transition. The decline experienced by students as an overall sample support the previous research claims which suggest that the transition from primary school to secondary school disrupts students' learning (Alspaugh, 1998). Similar to previous research, these results confirm the assumptions that moving from primary to secondary school can be a particularly challenging time for students in regards to their general academic achievement and that many students will experience a drop in their levels of achievement (Benner & Graham, 2009; Hanwald, 2013).

While the general achievement of students across transition had been explored in the literature, the reading achievement of students across the transition phase had not been covered extensively (Du Toit & Bouwer, 2009). Although there is some literature that has focused on students' reading achievement across transition (Nield, 2009; West & Schwerdt, 2012), the present research adds to the current findings surrounding this topic within the

research field. Results from the statistical analyses of student test data indicated that, for the majority of students in the present study, reading skills as measured by the *PAT-R* declined as students moved from primary to secondary school. These findings highlight and confirm previous literature, which stated that there is a problem for students in this phase of their education (De Wit et al., 2010; Dinham & Rowe, 2008).

The evidence of a decline in students' reading achievement across the transition phase reported in the present study supported the work of a number of researchers. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) concluded that 38% of students do less well in tests of reading ability after they have transitioned from primary to secondary school. Similar findings were also reported in the late 1990s by Galton et al. (1999), who reported a decline in students' reading achievement during the transition from Year 7 to Year 8, and Alsplaugh (1998), who found a consistent dip in pupils' reading attainment as they progressed from one Year to the next. There is also research evidence to suggest that while reading declines are most common for students who are already underachieving at school, high achievers have also been found to experience declines in their reading capabilities (Cox & Kennedy, 2008). This was also evident within the present research, as students who achieved the highest *PAT-R* test scores in Year 6 showed a decline in these scores in Year 7.

Findings from this research add to the work of previous researchers and suggest that moving from primary to secondary school can be a particularly problematic time for students' reading development and reading achievement and, despite the research which has been conducted in the area, confirm that many adolescent students continue to find reading a challenge after transitioning into their first year of secondary school. Previous studies in the area have attributed the decline in students' academic achievement across transition to a number of factors, and explanations have been explored as to why many students experience declines in their general academic achievement across transition. Researchers have attributed

the decline to inconsistent approaches to the curriculum between primary and secondary schools (McGee et al., 2004), disparities between primary and secondary teaching methods (Galton et al., 1999; Topping, 2011), disparities between the primary and secondary school environments (Alspaugh, 1998), socioeconomic factors (West & Schwerdt, 2012), and developmental factors associated with the adolescent years (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Within the present study, many of these factors were also found to be possibly contributing causes for the reading achievements of students and are therefore discussed in detail in the proceeding sections of this chapter.

While the pattern of decline in reading achievement across the overall student sample was quite significant, this pattern was not consistent with students' achievement on the *SWST*. Analysis of the student test data revealed that students' *SWST* scores increased across the transition phase, with students achieving higher *SWST* scores in Year 7 than Year 6. This could suggest that the Year 7 writing program used by teachers was well linked to the Year 6 writing program, with the students in Year 7 provided with opportunities to extend their spelling and writing skills.

Findings in spelling at the overall school level therefore challenge the literature which states that academic decline will often occur post transition (Coffey et al., 2011). There is research evidence which claims that students who have difficulties with reading will also experience difficulties with the development of their spelling skills throughout school (Maughan et al., 2009). However, the present findings revealed that this is not always the case, as students' spelling scores increased at the same time that their reading scores declined. This suggests that the writing program in Year 7 is well maintained, but that this is not the case for the reading comprehension program in many schools. This level of maintenance in the students' spelling performance may reflect the opinion expressed by both the Year 6 and 7 literacy teachers that there was a focus on improving the students' persuasive writing skills

at the time the data was collected. If so, this supports the argument that a consistent curriculum with established expectations and strategies is often associated with students' academic achievement (Cox & Kennedy, 2008; Hattie, 2003; Hattie, 2009).

The relationship between transition and students' spelling achievement has not been explored extensively, with most literature surrounding adolescents' spelling achievement being focused on adolescents with disabilities or dyslexia. Even so, a study conducted in the early 1990s identified that students experienced a dip in their spelling progress as they moved from primary to secondary school (Fouracre, 1993). Fouracre concluded that the drop was due to teacher pedagogy and the academic discontinuity between primary and secondary school teaching methods. Students' spelling achievement across transition and teacher pedagogy were also explored in the present research, and therefore this study adds to the current body of transition literature through the examination of spelling achievement across transition. Findings from this research challenge the existing negativity often reported in the literature about students' transition into secondary school, as it has identified that a drop in literacy from primary to secondary school in not always the outcome of transition. It also suggests that reading comprehension may be more affected by transition than other elements of literacy, such as spelling.

The question as to why reading comprehension is more challenging to maintain in secondary school has been researched by Dymock and Nicholson (2010); Ortlieb, Verlaan, and Cheek (2013), and Woolley (2011). Ortlieb et al. (2013) maintained that too often secondary school teachers failed to continue to teach and focus on providing their students with instruction associated with vocabulary development, word meanings and word families, reading fluency strategies, and to engage students with different types of comprehension questions. Woolley (2011) argued that Australian secondary school teachers need to use three different types of reading comprehension questions for different purposes. The initial

comprehension questions occur before the reading, where the reader has to predict what is likely to occur in the text based on relevant information. For example, students can be questioned about possible themes of the book after looking at the title, and students' prior knowledge of the theme can be discussed. The second set of comprehension questions occur during reading, where the student is asked questions that clarify what he/she is reading. For example: How did this happen? When did this occur? Who was involved? The third type of comprehension questions occur at the end of the reading and focus on interpreting and understanding the whole text, its meaning and its construction. For example: Why did the character make the decision to do this? What would happen if he did not do this? What is likely to happen in the next chapter?

Dymock and Nicholson (2010) have also proposed that many secondary school teachers have a poor understanding of how to teach and maintain their students' reading comprehension skills, and they have suggested that secondary school teachers need to consider using at least the following five comprehension strategies with their students:

- Clarify with the students a particular word or text meaning.
- Ask each other questions about the content, the plot or information.
- Reflect and clarify their thoughts about the theme or meaning of the text.
- Relate the information, problem or event in the text to personal experience and other contexts.
- Summarise their findings to each other in their own words.

The lack of understanding some secondary teachers have in regards to reading instruction can be viewed as an important factor in the reading achievement of secondary school students. If Year 7 teachers are not equipped with the skills to teach reading appropriately in Year 7,

then students will be unable to develop and build upon their existing skill set. This is particularly problematic for students who already find the demands of reading difficult.

Type of Transition

Research Question 2: Do students who transition into secondary school externally experience greater declines in their literacy achievement as determined by the PAT-R and the SWST than students who transition into secondary school internally?

The analysis of students' test data revealed that differences did occur between the reading and spelling achievement of students who transitioned externally and those students who transitioned internally. It was identified that students who transitioned externally experienced greater declines in their reading *PAT-R* achievement than students who transitioned internally. The results also revealed that, while students in separate campus and same campus schools experienced an increase in *SWST* scores, this increase was greatest for students who transitioned internally.

As noted previously, comparisons of students' test achievement between those who transition internally and those who transition externally have not been addressed extensively in the literature. The findings from the present research, therefore, add to the current body of literature and suggest that the type of transition students engage in does have an influence upon their literacy achievement. Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) stated that it would be interesting to conduct research in a context where primary and secondary students attend the same school within the same building and the present research addressed this gap. Researchers have proposed that students who remain on the same campus during transition have more successful transitions into secondary school than students who physically change campuses (Ferguson & Fraser, 1999; West & Schwerdt, 2012). Findings by Alspaugh (1998),

who examined the transition experiences of students in Year 5 to Year 6, and Year 7 to Year 8, proposed that students who attend K-8 schools showed a greater gain in their achievement across transition than students who had to move from one school to another (Alspaugh, 1998). Similarly, Ferguson and Fraser (1999) reported that students who remained on the same campus in a K-10 school experienced fewer deteriorations in their learning than students who moved schools at the end of primary school. The results of the present research confirm these findings, as at the overall school level achievement in reading declined more for those students who transitioned externally than for those students who transitioned internally.

A number of reasons have been proposed as to why moving campuses causes greater difficulty for students than for students who remain in the same school during the transition phase. For many students, the move to a bigger, unfamiliar environment is quite daunting, and can cause emotional apprehensiveness as well as a decline in academic achievement (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Traditionally, the primary school environment is generally smaller than a secondary school with fewer classrooms, smaller grounds and a lesser number of students and teachers. The nature of the primary school setting is also regarded to be more nurturing than secondary schools, whereby students are well known to their teachers, their needs can be readily catered for and their peer groups have been established throughout the primary school years (Hawk & Hill, 2001). The structure of a secondary school, however, is quite different. Secondary schools are typically larger, with many more teachers and a much greater number of students. As students in the present research who transitioned externally experienced a greater decline in their reading achievement than students who transitioned from internal schools, it could be proposed that this was due to the difference in structure between the primary and secondary school environments. Students who experience an external transition are required to adjust to a number of changes that are not as prevalent for students who transition internally. For some students, the move to a new environment and the

opportunity to make new friends is an exciting and rewarding experience. Even so, the majority of the research literature states that many students who transition externally find the move challenging (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009; De Wit et al., 2010; West & Schwerdt, 2012).

Not only are students required to leave their familiar primary school environment and adjust to new rules and regulations, but they are also required to break the bonds they had previously developed with their primary school teachers and peers (Nield, 2009). Making new friends, developing new relationships with teachers, coping with new forms of curriculum delivery and meeting teachers' expectations present additional stresses for students (McGee et al., 2004). It needs to be recognised that this transition to a new social network occurs at a time when the students are undergoing a number of physical and psychological changes. The evidence is that peers and peer groups have more influence on the actions and behaviours of adolescents as they extend their networks outside of the family unit as part of developing autonomy, and there are new connections established beyond the family into the broader social community (Hay & Ashman, 2012). In such an environment, peer networks have a stronger motivational influence on students' attention, with many students becoming less motivated by academic tasks (Frydenberg, 2010). Friendships and social networks are, in part, protective factors. That is, they help to reduce vulnerability to stress or loneliness by helping adolescents cope and develop as individuals. For example, Simmons and Hay (2010) identified that, during the adolescent period, friends provide emotional support, a sense of belonging, and comfort in the knowledge that someone else may be going through similar challenges, helping them to understand that there are others to whom they can talk.

Moving to a new school may also bring fears of being bullied, getting lost or not being able to cope with the social and academic demands of secondary schooling (Mizelle, 2005). In addition, there is literature to suggest that discontinuities in the curriculum and

teaching approaches between the primary and secondary school environments are contributors to student academic declines (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; McGee et al., 2004). This also emerged as a key theme within the present study and will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Socioeconomic Status and Student Achievement

Research Question 3: Do students from schools in higher socioeconomic areas perform better on the PAT-R and SWST than students from schools in low socioeconomic areas during the transition phase?

The results revealed that overall, students who attended schools in high socioeconomic areas achieved significantly higher *PAT-R* scores during the transition phase than students who attended schools situated in middle or low socioeconomic areas. While schools in both high and low socioeconomic areas experienced a decline in test scores during the transition, the results identified that the greatest decline in *PAT-R* test achievement was experienced by students from schools situated in the lowest socioeconomic areas. Interestingly, the overall *PAT-R* test achievement of students who attended schools in the middle SES areas did not increase or decline following transition.

Literature investigating the achievement of adolescents and their SES is well documented in the research field, and has found that students from low SES communities do not perform as well as their peers from middle or high SES areas (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Reyes et al., 2000). The numerous changes accompanying transition have been identified to be particularly damaging to students from lower SES backgrounds, with many students from these communities finding it difficult to adjust to school, on both a social and an academic level, in the year following transition (Reyes et al., 2000). McGee et al. (2004)

highlighted the importance of SES as a contributing factor towards a students' success, and they go so far as to state that a student's achievement may be more related to SES than to any other factor.

While at the overall school level it would appear that this was the case, findings from this research, in part, challenge the existing literature when examining schools at the individual level. It was noted that, despite research which suggests that students from lower SES areas were often low achievers in comparison to high or middle SES students (Reyes et al., 2000), students from one urban, low SES primary school (School 4) achieved the second highest *PAT-R* score when they were in Year 6. At the primary school level, this finding provides evidence to suggest that not all students in lower SES schools are underachieving in the area of reading. The issue is that when these students transferred into a new and more complex learning environment, their reading achievement declined the most out of all the participating schools. Thus, this result did support research findings that suggest that SES is a contributing factor for the decline in students' academic ability as they move through school (McGee et al., 2004) and, as proposed by Reyes et al. (2000), students who come from low SES schools will experience greater difficulty across the transition phase than students from higher SES areas.

Recent research conducted by West and Schwerdt (2012) examined students' achievement across transition in the areas of reading and mathematics and found that students from lower SES areas, who were already achieving below the expected average, experienced large decreases in their reading achievement. Similarly, in their research on adolescent literacy and achievement, Snow and Biancarosa (2003) found that an achievement gap exists in reading ability between students who come from advantaged and less advantaged backgrounds. These researchers argued that students living in low SES areas continue to perform below the expected levels, with many students unable to pass standardised tests or

perform basic classroom activities. It has also been documented that children from lower SES families attending schools in low SES neighbourhoods are more likely to experience reading difficulties throughout their school life (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). This was also the case within the present research, and such findings could suggest that students who attend schools in low SES areas have a more difficult time adjusting to the transition to a new school environment.

An examination of the overall cohort's achievement on the *SWST* revealed that, similar to the *PAT-R* results, students from schools situated in the high socioeconomic areas achieved the highest *SWST* scores across the transition phase. Interestingly, although the high SES schools achieved the highest test scores, students from the low SES schools obtained the largest increase in *SWST* scores during transition. These results presented a direct contrast to the findings above and, contrary to previous research, indicated that SES was not a significant influencing factor upon students' skills in spelling during the transition phase.

These findings stand in contrast to previous research that identified that students from lower income backgrounds perform lower in reading, spelling and writing achievement than students from high income areas (Teale & Gambrell, 2011). As discussed above, there has been considerable agreement in the literature that students from low SES backgrounds show impairments in their reading and spelling skills as they progress through school, and research by Maughan et al. (2009) concluded that a particular concern is that these students rarely catch up to their higher achieving peers. While this was true for reading, this research found that, although students from the high SES schools achieved the highest *SWST* scores overall, students from the low SES schools achieved the largest increase in *SWST* scores. The low SES students improved as they transitioned rather than declined, and these improvements revealed that they did in fact "catch up" to their high SES peers as well as achieve higher *SWST* scores than students from middle SES schools.

As with students' achievement in reading, some interesting findings emerged when examining schools at the individual level, which go against the findings from previous literature. As was outlined in the previous chapter, students from School 4 (a low SES primary school) had the largest increase in *SWST* scores across the transition phase and students transitioning from School 5a (a low SES primary school) to 5b (a low SES secondary school) had the second highest *SWST* achievement across transition.

Despite the research evidence, which suggests otherwise, the fact that students improved in their spelling capabilities and that students from low SES schools improved the most across the transition, phase raises a number of questions. Why do students from lower SES areas experience declines in their reading scores during the transition phase but not their spelling scores? Is there something in the way spelling is taught that enables students to maintain their spelling skills? While these questions were not explored explicitly in the present research, they open areas for future investigation.

The present findings add to the current body of literature and suggest that academic decline is not always a consequence for adolescents as they progress from primary to secondary education. Recent research has claimed that students in lower SES areas can experience increases in their literacy performance with the appropriate guidance and support from families and professionals (Teale & Gambrell, 2011), with Hattie (2009) arguing that it is the quality of the teaching, the appropriateness of the program to the students' need, the quality of the feedback to the students, and the learning activities that are the critical student achievement factors, not the student's socioeconomic background. It could be suggested, therefore, that there is something in the way that spelling was taught in primary, secondary and district schools which enabled students to maintain their spelling capabilities. The pedagogical methods used by teachers are further explored later in this chapter.

Overall, these findings suggest that the socioeconomic area in which a school is located does have an influence upon the literacy achievement of students in regards to reading, but SES appeared to have little or no influence upon students' spelling achievement. These findings both support and conflict with those of previous researchers which have focused on the relationship between SES and students' literacy achievement. Further research could be conducted in this area with a focus on the relationship between SES and students' literacy achievement, specifically in the area of spelling and writing. The current literature surrounding SES has focused primarily on the student's background, whereas this study focused on the SES of the school students attended. Currently, there is little research that compares the impact of transition on students from low, middle and high SES schools, and therefore this research adds something new to the research field. However, much more investigation is needed in the area.

Programs and Practices

Research Question 4: What literacy practices and programs are primary school, secondary school and district school teachers currently using to prepare adolescent students for the demands of secondary school literacy?

Analysis of the teacher interview data revealed that there were both similarities and differences between the practices and programs used by primary, secondary and district school teachers to prepare their students for secondary school literacy. These findings are presented in the section below which, for ease of reading, has been divided into primary, secondary and district school practices and programs.

Primary school programs and practices.

As was evident in the teacher response data, discussions with the primary school teachers during the interview process revealed that they had a structured approach to literacy teaching. Within the primary school classrooms there was an emphasis on teaching skills, with set times each day allocated to the teaching of spelling, reading and writing. All the primary school teachers reported the use of set programs within their classrooms for the teaching of these skills. The literacy practices reported by the primary school teachers during the interviews were also consistent across the schools, with group work highlighted by all teachers as the most common practice, followed by whole class lessons and individual work on sentence construction, reading passages, word meaning, writing tasks and spelling tests. Time was typically made available for quiet reading, where the students read a self-selected book.

Interview data also revealed that teaching practices within the primary schools were "student-centred" whereby students interests and needs were considered an important part of the teaching process. As students were with the one teacher for the entire school day, students could be nurtured in the classroom environment through the building of relationships with both teachers and fellow peers. In comparison, the secondary literacy programs were reported to be primarily focused on writing particular text types (such as narratives and persuasive essays), and extended set book and novel studies that involved text analyses and explorations of the construction of writing for different audiences and purposes.

Interestingly, although literacy skills were taught in a structured fashion, only 40% (2 of 5) of primary school teachers reported a whole school approach to literacy instruction, indicating that different programs were used within the same school to teach the skills of reading, writing and spelling. While the primary school teachers had a structured, routine approach to literacy instruction, all reported that they were unaware of the literacy programs

used in secondary schools and, as a result, stated that they were not able to prepare their students adequately for secondary literacy. Only 60% (3 of 5) of primary school teachers stated that they used specific programs or activities to prepare their students for secondary literacy.

Secondary school programs and practices.

Analysis of the teacher data revealed that the secondary school teachers differed to the primary school teachers in terms of their literacy practices and programs. Unlike the primary school teachers, who utilised structured programs to teach reading, writing and spelling, no secondary school teachers reported the use of an explicit spelling program and only 28% (2 of 7) used a reading program. However, all secondary school teachers stated that they had a set program for teaching writing. These findings could indicate that for secondary school teachers, there was an emphasis on teaching content rather than basic skills, as there was a common belief amongst the teachers that students should have already acquired the knowledge of reading and spelling prior to entering secondary school. The secondary school teachers stated that literacy teaching in Year 7 moved away from a student-centred approach to a greater focus on subject knowledge, and students being assessed and achieving an expected standard of academic performance. There was also a belief that content and subject knowledge were at the centre of secondary education and, rather than teaching to the individual, many secondary school teachers focused only on their own specialised subject areas, a finding also noted by Hawk and Hill (2001).

Where it has been proposed that the purpose of primary education is to prepare students for the demands of secondary school, secondary schools are regarded as places for students to build on the knowledge from the primary school phase, achieve high standards, narrow the achievement gap and assist low performing students to catch up (Howe, 2011). As

mentioned above, these characteristics were not supported in the present research, as only 28% (2 of 7) of secondary school teachers stated that efforts were made in their school to align with the primary school curriculum, with the same number of secondary school teachers stating that supporting or nurturing students was important for literacy development. The secondary school teachers revealed they were not aware of the programs and practices used in the primary schools and, therefore, building upon the knowledge of students could not be done sufficiently or accurately. Many of the secondary school teachers were unaware of the practices and programs used in primary school classrooms and therefore a fresh start approach was often adopted to assess the reading, spelling and writing capabilities of incoming students. The fresh start approach has been explored by previous researchers (McGee et al., 2004) and will be further discussed later in this chapter.

District school programs and practices.

The analysis revealed that 71% (5 of 7) of the district teachers used set reading, spelling and writing programs and, like the primary school teachers, had allocated blocks each day dedicated to the teaching of these skills. The types of practices used by the district school teachers were also similar to the primary school teachers, with 71% of district school teachers placing an emphasis on group work. Unlike the primary and secondary school teachers, however, all of the district school teachers stated that integration was their most common practice in the classroom for literacy instruction. District school teacher interview data also revealed that literacy instruction was directed by a whole school literacy approach, whereby all teaching staff used the same programs and practices to teach reading, spelling and writing throughout the school. This whole school approach promoted curriculum continuity and awareness as teachers were aware of the content covered at each year level. Within the district schools, it was also common for Year 6 and Year 7 students to be together

in a composite class and/or to have the same teacher for all subjects. This approach was utilised to decrease disruptions during transition and to align with the pedagogy of the primary schools.

The consistency in literacy programs and practices, in addition to the structure of the Year 6 to Year 7 transition, may have been a contributing factor to the success district school students experienced during the transition phase. The programs, practices and preparation used in the district schools were consistent with those proposed by previous researchers as successful methods of supporting students throughout transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Zeedyk et al., 2003).

Previous research proposed that preparing students for secondary school involves teachers working together, planning together, coordinating assessment tasks from one year to the next, sharing work samples, and being aware of the needs of individual students (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009; Prosser, 2008). These methods were reported by the district school teachers as being a part of their practice. Unlike primary and secondary school teachers, district school teachers had greater accessibility to these methods due to the structure of their school environments. Previous studies have identified three key areas that would enable students to be better supported throughout the transition phase. These include coordinating curriculum links and providing continuity in learning styles (Hawk & Hill, 2001), increasing the liaison between primary and secondary school staff in the interest of ensuring curriculum continuity and a better system of information exchange (Galton et al., 1999), and a consistent pedagogy between primary and secondary school teachers (McGee et al., 2004). Data from the present study identified that these key areas were part of the district schools teachers' practices and, therefore, may have been the cause for the success district school students experienced in their reading and spelling tests across transition. Each of the above points is relevant to the present research and is discussed in detail in the next section.

Preparing for Transition

Research Question 5: How do primary, secondary and district school teachers prepare students for the transition into secondary school?

The teacher interview data revealed that teachers from each of the three school types utilised two main methods in order to prepare their students for the transition phase: orientation programs and providing support for students at risk of underachievement. Transition orientation programs were also reported by all of secondary and district school teachers. In comparison, primary school teachers did not report the use of a transition program to prepare their students for secondary school. Although common methods were found between the three school types, there was also a large amount of variance between methods of transition preparation.

Primary to secondary school transition.

Transition preparation was not reported as a top priority by the primary school teachers, and it was found that 60% (3 of 5) of primary school teachers did not do anything to prepare their students for secondary school. For those teachers who did engage in some form of preparation, it was reported that transition programs and activities were designed and delivered by the secondary school staff and, as a result, the primary school teachers were given little or no input into the way students were prepared for secondary school. Transition preparation within the primary schools was based around accommodating requests from secondary schools that involved hosting orientation or activity days. Although 80% (4 of 5) of the primary school teachers reported that they spoke to their students about secondary school, none of the primary schools had a specific transition program in place.

For the secondary schools, methods of transition preparation were quite different. Unlike the primary school teachers, secondary school teachers placed a high level of importance on preparing students for transition. They had an active role in transition preparation, with all teachers stating that they used transition programs within their schools. The secondary school teachers were responsible for the design and delivery of these programs and utilised a number of preparation activities. The secondary school teachers, however, did not collaborate with primary school staff in regards to conceptualising and developing these programs and activities, which were found to be focused around the structural and social demands of secondary school rather than the academic demands.

The research findings highlighted a key issue for students who transition externally. Research has suggested that successful transition programs are based on collaboration between primary and secondary school teachers and staff (McGee et al., 2004; Topping, 2011) and that programs that provide students and parents with information, support students during transition and bring primary and secondary school teaching staff together to learn about each other's curriculum have been found to promote positive transition experiences for students (Mizelle, 2005). Within the present study, this collaboration did not occur well, or occurred on a minimal basis, and the transition programs and activities designed by the secondary teachers therefore may not have been appropriate for addressing the needs of the primary school students. Research also revealed that schools with insufficient or inaccurate transition preparation have higher levels of underachievement and school dropout rates than schools with more successful transition programs (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; West et al., 2010). Therefore, these findings highlight the importance of adequate transition preparation.

Research proposed that one way to ensure students are engaged in appropriate transition preparation programs is to involve primary school teachers in the development and implementation of transition programs and activities whereby, through collaboration between

primary and secondary school staff, students' needs can be identified and appropriately addressed in transition programs (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Mizelle, 2005). Primary school teachers need to be aware of the programs and practices used at the secondary schools, and secondary school teachers need to be aware of what knowledge students already have as they enter secondary school and utilise this to inform their teaching practice (Hawk & Hill, 2001) and develop appropriate and aligned curriculum approaches.

In some ways, an example of this lack of awareness between the primary and secondary schools teachers that Hawk and Hill (2001) discussed is the greater use of extended set readers or chapter novels in secondary school classrooms. In secondary schools, the Year 7 students were typically expected to read a set novel at home and be prepared to discuss its content and the author's method of plot and character construction in class. The primary school teachers, however, were not aware of this practice and so did not prepare the students well for this type of literacy activity. Similarly, because the secondary school teachers made assumptions about the students' level of extended reading ability, they did less preparation work in the classroom about the novel, its vocabulary and its construct at the sentence level, nor provided additional support to students with limited reading fluency. In this situation, the disconnection between the reading programs from Year 6 to Year 7 reflects a somewhat different philosophical approach to the literacy tasks. The primary school teachers used more scaffolding in their approach to literacy learning, with novels used in Year 6 programs as opportunities for the students to read a book that the student liked for pleasure. In contrast, the secondary teachers were more focussed on the higher order thinking associated with the novel, with the teachers setting a novel or book because of its level of complexity and its ability to be interpreted and analysed by the readers. In part, this reflects the reality that the secondary school teachers were also teaching a number of different class groups across a number of year grades, with each grade in the secondary school expected to

be able to read a set novel and analysis its construction. The evidence is that the district school teachers were more aware of this disconnection in expectations in terms of extended book reading, and they tended to delay this type of literacy practice until later in their literacy program, focussing more on building up the Year 7 students' vocabulary and sentence construction knowledge.

The other related issue in regards to this is that, in the primary school classroom, the one teacher also taught the vocabulary and word meanings associated with the Year 6 students' science program, their history program, their SOSE program, their art program, their mathematics program as well as their English program. In this situation, the one primary school teacher was able to better integrate and so connect the students' literacy development across the whole of the Year 6 curriculum program. In secondary schools, however, different teachers taught different subjects. The mathematics teacher, for example, might have taught mathematics across Years 7 to 10. Specialist teachers such as these are more subject/content focussed and often less interested in, connected to, or even aware of the need to teach students' literacy skills as part of the lesson in that content knowledge subject (Moni & Hay, 2012; Woolley, 2011).

District school transition.

The disparity experienced between primary and secondary schools in regards to transition preparation was not reported as a major concern by the district school teachers. For these teachers, methods of transition preparation were similar to those utilised by both primary school and secondary school teaching staff. The district teachers revealed that transition preparation was relatively unproblematic in their schools, as students transitioned internally and were therefore already familiar with the structure of the school, the teachers

and their fellow peers, with many of the teaching practices used in the Year 6 program also continued or considered in the Year 7 program.

While the primary and secondary school teachers reported a passive/active approach to transition in which primary school teachers had minimal input and secondary school teachers were the main organisers of transition activities, the district school teachers reported a collaborative approach to transition preparation. These teachers worked together to develop suitable transition programs and activities that would meet the needs of their students. Collaboration was more accessible for the district school teachers as teachers were in contact on a daily basis, which enabled a number of advantages. Hawk and Hill (2001) proposed that successful transition preparation involved coordinated curriculum links, interaction between primary and secondary students, the sharing of programs and practices between teachers and the continuity of learning styles. This type of preparation was more easily accessible for the district teachers. Their comprehensive transition programs may have contributed to the smaller decline in *PAT-R* and *SWST* achievement the students who transitioned internally experienced, in comparison to students who transitioned externally.

As a part of their transition preparation, discussions with the district school teachers also revealed that all district school teachers actively prepared their students for the literacy demands of secondary school. This preparation was less reported by any of the primary or secondary school teachers. Catch up programs were also reported as a method of transition preparation by 42% (3 of 7) of the district school teachers. Catch up programs were designed to assist students who may be at risk of underachievement through additional teacher support opportunities. District school teachers were the only teachers within the study to utilise this method.

The findings from Research Question 4 revealed that a disparity existed in the methods of transition preparation between primary and secondary school teachers, something

that was not reported by the district school teachers. Discussions with the primary and secondary school teachers demonstrated that there was a lack of communication between the two systems in regards to transition programs and practices. This has also been identified in previous research (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Hawk & Hill, 2001; Zyngier, 2010). The need for greater communication therefore became apparent, and is discussed in another section of this chapter.

Enhancing the Transition Experience

Research Question 6: What methods do teachers perceive as being most necessary for the promotion of literacy development and successful transition experiences for students across the transition phase?

Discussions of results pertaining to Research Question 4 and Research Question 5 presented key points from the teacher interview data in regards to the programs and practices that primary, secondary and district school teachers used to prepare students for secondary literacy and for the transition to secondary school. It was found that primary and secondary school teachers were not aware of the programs and practices used in each other's schools to teach literacy and, as a result, continuity from one year to the next was not being maintained. This was less the case for the district school teachers, who maintained a whole school approach to literacy instruction. It was also noted that minimal communication occurred between primary and secondary school teachers in regards to literacy practices. For district school teachers, communication was engaged in on a daily basis. Finally, the data revealed that secondary school teachers played an active role in transition preparation whereas primary teachers did not organise transition preparation activities for their students. All Year 6 and Year 7 district school teachers had an active approach to transition.

Three key findings emerged from the data in regards to the types of practices teachers across all school types believed would enable them to improve the transition phase for their students. These were greater curriculum continuity and an increase in awareness of each other's programs and practices, greater communication between Year 6 and Year 7 teachers and an increase in teacher support. These findings reinforce the work of Shulman (1987) who stated that teacher pedagogy and curriculum cannot be separated but are, in fact, linked and therefore cannot be dealt with separately.

Curriculum continuity and awareness.

Curriculum discontinuity has been highlighted in previous international literature as an area of concern in adolescent education (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Past research proposed a number of problems with the delivery and organisation of the curriculum across primary and secondary schools (Topping, 2011), with the main problem being a lack of continuity in the curriculum. Curriculum continuity has been found to suffer as a result of transition (McGee et al., 2004) and it has been proposed that this is due to a "gap" that exists between the two school structures (Hawk & Hill, 2001).

Curriculum continuity and awareness emerged as a key finding from the data here, and revealed that there was a lack of curriculum continuity and awareness between Year 6 and Year 7 teachers. Primary and secondary school teachers indicated that they were unaware of the literacy practices being used in each other's school system, and all of them believed that an increase in curriculum continuity and awareness would enable them to better prepare students for secondary school. The lack of curriculum continuity and awareness in literacy preparation amongst the primary and secondary school teachers was an important finding, as inadequate preparation for secondary school has been reported as a key determinant in the

level of success students experience in their achievement post transition (Galton et al., 1999; Nield, 2009).

A disparity between methods of teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools became evident within the present study, highlighting a lack of curriculum continuity and awareness between the two systems. This disparity has also been explored in previous literature and researchers have proposed that the curriculum suffers during the transition phase due to a shift from the student-centred, experiential primary classrooms, to the didactic, subject-based approach used in secondary schools (Moni & Hay, 2012; Topping, 2011). It has been proposed that the inconsistencies between the two models of education present difficulties for students during the transition phase, as students are required to adjust from primary school to the different environment of secondary school. One key contributing factor for the disparity evident between the primary and secondary models of teaching is pedagogical approach (Jindal-Snape & Foggie 2008; Woolley, 2011). During transition, teaching moves away from being organised around the whole child and moves towards a specialised subject-based approach. The expectations of teachers differ as well as the nature of some important relationships between teachers and students (Tonkin & Watt, 2003). Geographical separation between primary and secondary school campuses has also been identified as a contributing factor (Hawk & Hill, 2001). Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) proposed that a gap exists between the expectations of primary and secondary school systems and it is this gap that is problematic for curriculum continuity and awareness.

While the district school teachers did not identify curriculum continuity and awareness as an area of concern, 14% (1 of 7) of district teachers stated that curriculum continuity and awareness was important and could be further enhanced at their schools, indicating that it was highly valued. As the district school data revealed, curriculum continuity and awareness can be improved through communication between primary and secondary school staff. This

communication is made easier for district school teachers as they are on the same campus and have constant contact with one another. For many primary and secondary schools, this contact is more difficult to maintain. Although the introduction of the new National Curriculum may provide some relief for primary and secondary school teachers regarding curriculum awareness, this cannot ensure continuity (McGee et al., 2004) and, therefore, effective professional relationships need to be developed and maintained between primary and secondary schools. Hawk and Hill (2001) stated that the more teachers know about the programs in the previous schools the easier it is to target the individual needs of students and, therefore, support them through transition.

One way of addressing the problem of curriculum continuity and awareness would be for schools to develop a greater shared pedagogy between primary and secondary school teachers (Hattie, 2009; Mizelle, 2005). This type of professional sharing involves collaboration, and in order for collaboration to occur, communication is required between teachers in both primary and secondary schools. The importance of communication was identified by the teachers from each of the three school types as a key area of need and has been addressed in detail below.

Communication.

A lack of communication between primary and secondary school staff in regards to literacy practices and transition preparation was identified as a second key finding from this research. This finding emerged from common reports from both primary and secondary school teachers which revealed that communication between primary and secondary school staff occurred on a minimal basis and, therefore, was in need of improvement. As mentioned above, maintaining curriculum continuity and awareness was difficult for the primary and

secondary school teachers and this was largely due to the lack of communication between the two school systems.

Similar findings have also been reported by past researchers. Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) examined the primary to secondary transition experiences of students in a small scale, longitudinal study in Scotland. Their findings revealed that a lack of communication occurred between primary and secondary school teachers during the transition phase and, where communication did occur, it was common for information to be inaccurate or incomplete (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). Teaching professionals reported that insufficient communication prevented them from being able to support students appropriately during transition, a problem also reported by teachers in the present research.

Research evidence also exists which noted that liaison between primary and secondary school staff is viewed negatively by some teachers, who do not see the value in collaborative practices (McGee et al., 2004; Zyngier, 2010). Insufficient communication can lead to disparities in teaching practices, discontinuity in teaching strategies and the curriculum, repetition of primary school work in the secondary years and failure to address key learning areas (Ward, 2001). Some teachers have been reported to operate only in their own specialised teaching areas and this has been identified to cause a greater divide between primary and secondary school systems. While this divide was evident between the primary and secondary school teachers in the present research, all participating teachers identified communication as an area of need, indicating that they were aware of the benefits associated with such interaction and collaboration.

The lack of communication between the primary and secondary school teachers may have been a contributing factor that impacted the literacy test achievement of students as they progressed from primary to secondary school within the present research. It has been reported

that activities that promote liaison between primary and secondary schools can reduce transition related anxiety (McGee et al., 2004) and ensure a smoother transition for students. There is consensus in the literature that communication between primary and secondary school teachers and schools is vital during the transition phase (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Smith, 2005; Topping, 2011; West et al., 2010) and that teachers should be communicating in terms of the academic, social and organisational logistics of primary and secondary schools. Snow and Biancarosa (2003) proposed that there is a need for primary and secondary schools to engage in better networking in order to gather information about each other's school systems to ensure students receive the support they require as they make the progression from primary to secondary school. Similar to the present research, studies have also indicated that few schools have linking arrangements focused on the learning progression of students as they make the transition (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; McGee et al., 2004; Mizelle, 2005).

As most of the transition literature focuses on transitions which involve students moving from one school campus to another, Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) maintained that it is important to conduct research in a context where the primary and secondary years are in the same building or part of the same school. This was explored in the present research, which found that, unlike the primary and secondary school teachers from separate campus schools, communication was not reported as a vital area of need, by the district school teachers. This was largely due to the structural organisation of the district schools, which enabled communication to take place easily, as Year 6 and Year 7 district teachers were on the same campus and in contact with one another on a daily basis. Discussions with the district teachers revealed that shared planning, sharing student work samples and collaboration in regards to literacy practices and transition programs were engaged in regularly. The high level of communication amongst the district schools' staff may have been

a contributing factor to the success district school students experienced during the transition phase.

Communication was reported as a regular part of district school teachers' practice, but the results also revealed that 57% (4 of 7) of teachers reported that an increase in communication would enable them to better prepare their students for the transition phase. This may suggest that opportunities for communication are highly valued by teachers as a key contributor to student success, whether they are teachers from separate or same campus schools. Primary schools must communicate with secondary staff about incoming students with emphasis on students' academic achievement, special needs or behavioural problems. Secondary schools also need to communicate to incoming students and their parents, provide information about their schools, as well as their programs, services, policies and expectations (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

It is important that accurate and complete information is passed from the primary to secondary schools and vice versa, and this can be done through sufficient levels of communication. There is a need for greater amounts of networking between the two school systems, involving direct contact prior and during transition. It has also been proposed that teachers have the opportunity to work across primary and secondary schools (Topping, 2011; Zyngier, 2010) and the effectiveness of this method could be an area for further exploration. There is a need to reduce the gap between primary and secondary schools, particularly in terms of their expectations of students, and this might happen if there were more meaningful and ongoing communication (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006), curriculum sharing (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Migdley et al., 2000), and the linking of teaching practices between the two systems (Woolley, 2011).

Teacher support.

This research identified a number of differences in regards to the practices and programs used by primary, secondary and district school teachers, as well as their methods of transition preparation. In addition to these findings, analysis of the teacher data revealed a consistent agreement amongst the teachers in regards to the importance of teacher support. All teachers felt that an increase in teacher support was the main contributing factor that would enable them to support students more effectively throughout the transition phase, with teachers across all school types stating that increases in support were needed in their classrooms and in their schools.

In their exploration of effective transition programs, Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) maintained that appropriate support for teachers led to greater student success across transition. This was something that the teachers within the present study were increasingly aware of. As discussed above, an increase in curriculum continuity and awareness, and an increase in communication were reported as key areas of need by teachers from each of the three school types. In order to address the concerns of teachers reported in this research in regards to improving curriculum continuity and awareness and the level of communication between schools, teachers need to be given the appropriate support. As presented in Chapter 4, the teachers identified a number of areas where this support could be applied (see Table 15). Regular staff meetings, opportunity to share resources, time to identify areas of improvement, opportunities to support each other, increased aide time and increased planning time were identified by all of teachers across each of the three school types.

It has been proposed that improvements can be achieved in the two key areas of curriculum continuity and awareness, and communication between staff, if teachers are appropriately resourced. Teachers need to have the time to plan cross-curricular projects, discuss students' needs and meet as a team on a regular basis (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006;

McGee et al., 2004). Having the appropriate resources that are suitable for students in their school environment has also been identified as a method for improvement (Galton et al., 1999; Hattie, 2009). As the data from this research revealed, all teachers reported that planning time and appropriate resources are vital to improve student learning. The present results, therefore, suggest that if teachers had access to greater support they would be better prepared for ensuring their students have successful transition experiences.

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) proposed that facilitating effective transition depends on activities that are targeted towards the needs of students and teachers, and this view was supported in the present study. Teachers need to receive appropriate support, as teachers play a critical role in students' transition experiences. Teachers who are knowledgeable and sensitive to the impact transition can have on adolescent students are in a pivotal position to support students during this important step (Akos & Galassi, 2004). When students are exposed to an environment of high quality content and teaching they are more likely to learn (Hattie, 2009) and remain engaged in their learning (Migdley et al., 2000).

Students' Test Achievement and Teacher Practice

The previous section addressed each of the research questions, described the research findings and made links with current transition research. Until this point, the data has been dealt with and discussed separately in terms of student test achievement and teacher responses. This section presents a combination of the findings from the two data sets in order to present a summary of the relationships that existed between students' reading and spelling test achievement, type of transition, SES and the methods used by the teachers to prepare students for secondary school.

When examining the findings for this research, it became evident that the impact transition had upon students' reading and spelling achievement varied amongst each of the

three school types. It also became evident that the types of programs and practices used by the teachers, and the implementation of these, were somewhat diverse amongst the sample. Through an examination of each of the schools at the individual level, some relationships became evident between the two data sets, as presented in the previous chapter.

An interesting finding emerged from the data when schools were examined at the individual level. The data revealed that students from only one school, School 7 (a middle SES, district school where students transitioned internally) experienced an increase in both *PAT-R* and *SWST* achievement during the transition phase. The increases in students' test achievement at this school can be attributed to a number of factors that emerged as key findings within this research. School 7 was the only school in the study to report high levels of communication between primary and secondary staff, curriculum continuity throughout the school and a high level of awareness by teachers in regards to the programs and practices used in Year 6 and Year 7. Teachers from School 7 also felt that they were given sufficient levels of teacher support within their school (while still recognising that more support would be valuable), and, as a result, were able to effectively run consistent literacy and transition programs throughout the school.

Zyngier (2010) argued that a successful transition depends upon a combination of effective practices and programs, rather than single factors alone, and findings from the present research provide evidence to support these claims. School 7 utilised programs and practices which have been demonstrated to support students across the transition phase, such as curriculum continuity (Topping, 2011), communication (Nield, 2009) and teacher support (Akos & Galassi, 2004). As a result, students from this school maintained their reading and spelling achievement across transition.

In addition to the findings above, the results also revealed that students from School 4 (a low SES, primary school) had the largest decrease in their *PAT-R* achievement from Year

6 to Year 7 out of all the participating schools. Students from School 4 transitioned externally into School 1b (a middle SES, secondary school). When looking at these results in relation to the programs and practices teachers were using in their school, some explanations can be made for such a significant decline. As evident in Table 19, the teachers from School 4 and School 1b stated that there was neither communication between their schools regarding literacy practices and programs nor minimal curriculum awareness between the two schools. While teachers from School 4 reported a high level of teacher support at their school, teachers from School 1b stated that they had access to only average levels of support.

What these results suggest is that schools that do not have strong communication and support practices in place are not able to promote effective transition experiences for students across the transition phase. Dinham and Rowe (2008) stated that teachers reported being underprepared and ill-equipped when dealing with students in the middle years of education (Years 5 to 9), and results from the present research supports this finding. The fact that students from all external schools declined in their *PAT-R* achievement and teachers from these schools highlighted low levels of communication and curriculum continuity with their feeder school, as well as low levels of teacher support, could provide evidence to suggest that there is a relationship between students' literacy achievement across transition and the way teachers prepare, or do not prepare, students for the transition phase. These findings support the proposition outlined by Hattie (2003; 2009) and Migdley et al., (2000), that the class teacher critically determines the students' experience and academic success in school.

Relationships between the Findings

These patterns, in addition to the six research questions, enabled insight to be gained into the reading and spelling achievement of adolescent students as they made the transition

from primary school to secondary school. An understanding of the types of programs and practices teachers were using to support their students during the transition phase was also identified. As has been discussed in previous sections of this chapter, results from this research revealed some key relationships between students' test achievement and teacher practice. The teacher interview data demonstrated three key themes essential for the promotion of student achievement across the transition phase: curriculum continuity and awareness, communication between primary and secondary schools and teacher support. A graphical representation of these themes is presented below to enable a visual display of the relationship between the three themes. See Figure 7.

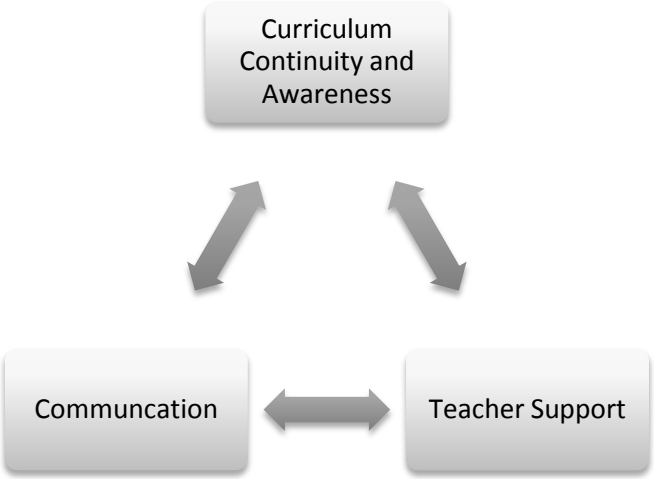

Figure 7. Trilogy of practices for successful transition

Figure 7 shows the three key areas of need that were identified from this research as practices necessary for the promotion of successful transition from primary to secondary school. This diagram illustrates that the three themes are interrelated and, therefore, the findings from this research suggest that a combination of these approaches is necessary to facilitate successful transition experiences for students from primary to secondary school.

Curriculum continuity and awareness cannot happen without communication between primary and secondary schools and staff. In addition, communication between staff will not be possible unless teachers are provided with the appropriate support needed to ensure opportunities for collaboration are available. Curriculum continuity and awareness are also dependent upon teacher support, as teachers need to be given sufficient time, resources and opportunities to create and develop curriculum tasks and activities that promote continuity from primary to secondary school.

Wider Framework

Within the present research, it was found that students from schools that promoted curriculum continuity and awareness, high levels of communication and teachers support were more successful in their reading and spelling achievement across transition, suggesting that these three variables are vital for transition success. While these key areas were important findings within the present study as factors contributing to the success of students' during the transition phase, this research acknowledged that these factors are not exhaustive, but rather sit within a larger framework in relation to adolescents and their success across transition in relation to reading and spelling. While schools and teachers play an important role in supporting adolescents during the transition phase, they are not the only factors found to influence a student's achievement across the transition phase. Figure 8 presents a visual display of the many factors which can have an impact on a student's transition experience and shows that in addition to the factors identified from this research (presented in bold), there are also a number of additional variables which contribute in shaping a students' transition experience.

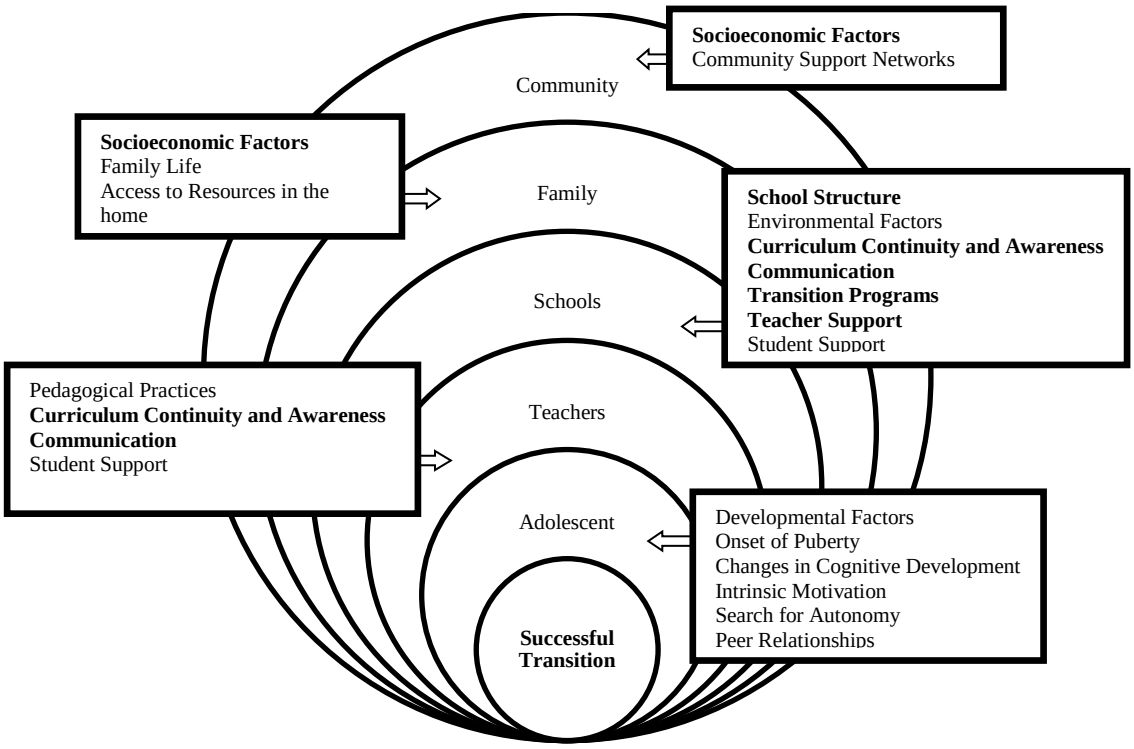

Figure 8. Factors promoting successful transition from primary to secondary school.

In conjunction with an exploration of the existing transition, the current investigation revealed that promoting a successful transition from primary school to secondary school depends upon a number of influencing factors, which constitute a wider framework for adolescent success during the transition phase (see Figure 8). A discussion of the relationship between the findings from this research, and their position within a wider framework, constitutes the remainder of this chapter.

Influencing Factors

Adolescence and middle schooling.

In addition to the key themes proposed by the present research, the developmental factors associated with adolescent years have also been identified as significant contributors to students' success during transition. Research by Hattie (2003; 2009) proposed that student

motivation and previous achievement, and working with a teacher who can engage the students, are typically the main influencing factors on students' success at school. Individual characteristics have been reported to be more important predictors of student success than socio-demographic, family or other factors (West et al., 2010). This view is also applicable within the present transition research, whereby the many factors associated with being an adolescent can influence a student's success across the transition phase.

The transition from primary to secondary school happens at a vulnerable stage in a student's life (Hawk & Hill, 2001). During this stage, students are undergoing a number of developmental changes, with the most monumental being the onset of the adolescent years. Adolescence is characterised by physical growth, increased sexual development and activity, bodily maturation, and cognitive and psychological changes (Hoyt, Chase-Lansdale, McDade & Adam, 2012). Socially, adolescence is the developmental stage that offers young people the opportunity to broaden their social spheres, away from the previous confines of immediate family relationships. Friendships are most prominent during the early to mid-adolescent years (11 to 16 years), where the influence of parents wanes and the lure of social peer interactions outside of the family unit take hold (Marion, Laursen, Zettergren & Bergman, 2013) and a decrease in intrinsic motivation for academic work is common (Frydenberg, 2010). Thus, the transition of students moving from primary to secondary school is just one of the many changes students encounter at this stage that secondary teachers need to aware of and consider when planning their program of instruction (Hawk & Hill, 2001; Reyes et al., 2000).

Considering the context of adolescence, many secondary teachers interviewed reported the desire to give the students a fresh start to secondary school, which often involved students revisiting work they had completed in their final year of primary school. The problem is that this approach in the Year 7 program may not be providing cognitive, social or

intellectual challenge to some students, resulting in stress, boredom and lack of motivation (McGee et al., 2004). In addition, during adolescence the importance of peer relationships and peer acceptance increases, but for many students, peer groups are disrupted across transition and, therefore, the need for social acceptance and the pressure of making and maintaining new friends becomes an additional stressor for many secondary school students (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Kingery, Erdley & Marshall, 2011; Simmons & Hay, 2010). The issues of disconnected social peer relationships and a disconnected academic program are considerably higher for students who experience an external transition. While many students may regard the transition phase as a step into adulthood, moving into secondary school is typically a step down in psychological status for students as they move from being the oldest in primary school to the youngest in secondary school (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Kingery et al., 2011). Again, these factors are most prevalent for students who experience an external transition into a new social learning setting.

Hormonal and physical changes also need to be considered as important influences during the transition phase. These changes have an impact upon students' physical appearance (Hoyt et al., 2012), self-concept (Hay & Ashman, 2012), motivation in school (Frydenberg, 2010; Migdley et al., 2000) and risk-taking behaviour, particularly by adolescent boys (Resnick et al.,1997). These developmental factors are considered to contribute to the anxiety and apprehensiveness many students experience during transition, particularly for students who transition into a new and more complex social setting and who are already at risk of underachievement (Kingery et al., 2011; Migdley et al., 2000). Teachers and schools therefore need to be sensitive to the development changes students encounter during the transition phase, and effective transition programs need to take developmental factors into account.

It has also been proposed that for adolescent learners, rather than take either a primary school or a secondary school learning model, a middle school model may be appropriate. Such a model should acknowledge the physical and psychological changes associated with adolescents, but recognise that the students may not yet have the cognitive and social skills to fully handle independent learning (Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005).

At its core, the aim of middle years education is to blend a student-centred primary school culture with a secondary school culture characterised by a subject academic orientation (Pendergast, 2006; Sinclair & Fraser, 2002). To achieve this blend, there is a considered focus in middle schooling upon social and support networks within a broad curriculum framework. This approach to pedagogy and curriculum is, in part, opposed to the increasing specialisation and differentiation among separate subjects that can be found in the traditional secondary school. Middle schooling does not refer to buildings or school structures, but rather to the provision of educational experiences that meet the challenging abilities and aspirations specific to the developmental needs of young adolescents (Chadbourne & Pendergast, 2005; Sinclair & Fraser, 2002). In focusing on adolescents, Sawyer et al. (2001) stated that beyond academic achievement, schools were an important social environment for adolescents that promoted peer connections, emotional control and health. They claimed that school-based interventions that created strong engagement between students and teachers and students' feelings of emotional safety resulted in reduced antisocial behaviours and psychological problems in adolescents. Thus, based on the evidence from this study, there is value in teachers in the Tasmanian educational system gaining a better understanding of the middle school philosophy and its practice, particularly in the schooling of students in Years 6 and Year 7.

Teachers and teacher pedagogy.

In line with the findings from the present research, it has been proposed that one of the most common reason many students encounter reading and spelling difficulties during the transition phase is due to a disparity in teaching pedagogy between primary and secondary teachers. As discussed in the previous section, this research identified inconsistencies between the pedagogical practices used by primary and secondary school teachers in separate campus schools to prepare students for the transition phase and for the demands of secondary school literacy. This research proposed that the disparity in teacher pedagogy was due to a lack of curriculum continuity, curriculum awareness and a lack of communication between primary and secondary schools. This section expands the present research findings by positioning them within a broader framework of teacher pedagogy as an influencing factor on students' reading and spelling achievement across transition.

The disparities in teacher pedagogy between primary and secondary school teachers have been extensively explored in the research literature (Hawk & Hill, 2001; De Wit et al., 2010; Hattie, 2009). Such literature proposed that students who fail to make strong relationships with their teachers are more likely to disengage from school (De Wit et al., 2010) or find the transition phase particularly challenging. Close and nurturing relationships between teachers and students are considered vital for student academic success and, therefore, the role of the teacher, teacher pedagogy and adequate teacher support during the transition phase is increasingly important for the promotion of successful transition.

In line with the focus within the areas of reading and spelling instruction, it has been found that primary school teachers place an emphasis on the skills of reading and spelling whereas secondary teachers place an emphasis on content knowledge and response (Galton et al., 1999), and, as a result, students with poor reading and spelling skills find secondary teaching approaches particularly difficult. One possible explanation for the declines many

students from the present research experienced in their reading achievement following the transition from primary to secondary school may be due to the disparities between primary and secondary reading instruction, as revealed in the interview data. When students are in their primary years, they are learning to read, whereby reading is taught as a standalone subject with an emphasis on skills such as decoding, letter blends, phonological awareness and letter sounds. As students progress through school, they move away from learning to read and are required to read to learn (Chall & Jacobs, 2003). Unlike the primary school classroom, secondary schools are subject-driven and, as students move into the secondary school classroom, reading becomes content focused and students are required to read and write across a range of disciplines, for a variety of purposes. If students enter secondary school without the skills to read at the expected level, understand words and their meaning, in addition to thinking critically and broadly, then reading in the content areas, or reading in secondary classrooms, can become problematic and cause difficulties for their future reading development (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003) and progression through school.

There is a general assumption among secondary school teachers that students have already learnt the necessary skills of reading and spelling at primary school and, therefore, students are expected to be able to read and spell at a certain level once they enter secondary school (Du Toit & Bouwer, 2009). If students enter secondary school without having these necessary skills, reading to learn becomes problematic, as reading skills are vital for learning in the different content areas. Well developed reading skills in the primary school years do not ensure students will automatically develop complex skills in reading as they progress through school and, therefore, there is a need for explicit reading instruction to continue throughout secondary school (Dymock & Nicholson, 2010; Ortlieb et al., 2013; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Woolley, 2011).

The pedagogical disparities between primary school and secondary school teachers in regard to the teaching of reading and spelling can be linked to Vygotsky's socio-cognitive learning theory (1978). Within the primary school setting, the results revealed that students were taught the skills of reading and spelling explicitly and on a regular basis. As the primary school teachers were the students' main subject teacher, these teachers felt that they had a thorough understanding of the cognitive levels of their students and were therefore able to provide support via scaffolding for students on a "needs be" basis. The results indicated that the primary school environment promoted aspects of the ZPD whereby the primary school teachers were able to support primary school students in their classroom though scaffolding and one-on-one assistance. The physical arrangement of the primary school classroom, with students generally seated in groups, as well as access to teacher's aides and parent help, further supported the development of the ZPD in the classroom, as opportunities for collaboration between students and a MKO were seen to be more available. As primary school students remained in the one classroom for the entirety of the school day with the same group of peers and the same teacher, social opportunities remained constant for the school year and cultural influences were stable and easily established. Vygotsky claimed that "learning is a necessary and universal aspect of developing culturally organised, specifically human psychological function" (1978, p.90). He stated that social learning tends to precede development, and this supports the aim of primary school education, which is to teach the fundamental skills of reading, spelling and writing before students enter secondary school.

Unlike that of the primary schools, the structures of the secondary school classrooms were not as facilitative in promoting the development of the ZPD. This may have been a possible cause for the difficulties the students faced during their transition to secondary school. The results revealed that, unlike primary schools, the basic skills of reading, writing and spelling were not taught as explicit subjects in the secondary school classroom. The

emphasis in secondary school shifted from a skills-based focus to a content focused approach to teaching. The lack of explicit instruction for the teaching of reading, writing and spelling skills can be regarded as problematic for students who enter secondary school without these basic skills, as there was no opportunity for support in these areas from a MKO. When students move into secondary school there is a shift from a student-centred approach to teaching to a teacher-directed approach (Moni & Hay, 2012) where students are required to become more independent in their learning, therefore minimising opportunities for the ZPD to be developed. The physical layout of the secondary school classroom often does not promote the idea of collaborative learning, as students are positioned in rows or are required to sit in individual desks (Hawk & Hill, 2001). In secondary school, the bonds between students and teachers become fragmented as students have a number of different teachers and associate with a wider peer group. Vygotsky viewed interactions with peers as an effective way to develop cognitive ability and mental functioning (McLeod, 2013), but due to the structure of the secondary school environment, opportunities for collaboration with peers and interactions with a MKO were limited.

It is known that students develop at different rates and abilities, and it should be recognised that although a student has entered secondary school, not all students will have the same literacy levels. In his theory of the ZPD, Vygotsky examined the difference between the actual age of development and the potential for development when collaboration occurs with a MKO. If only the unaided achievements of a student are observed, then only an inadequate portrayal of the students' developmental level will be obtained. Secondary teachers often receive graded marks for students prior to their entry to secondary school, but the validity of these marks can be questioned as they do not take into account the other aspects of students' capabilities. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that teachers should broaden their understanding of

development to account for the process of maturing as well as the inner functions that have matured. It was from this notion that the idea of the ZPD was developed.

It has been proposed that there are problems associated with trying the draw educational implications from Vygotsky's theory of the ZPD, as facilitating development through collaboration is neither behaviourist nor constructivist and overreliance can be developed by the student on the teacher. To combat this, the notion of scaffolding was developed (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976); a learning process designed to assist students in the development of learning. Scaffolding refers to the support given to a student which is tailored to their own learning needs and involves sufficient support to learn new concepts and skills and then removing this support gradually as students develop their own autonomous learning strategies (Sawyer et al., 2001). Results from the present research indicated that the method of scaffolding was more accessible for students who transitioned internally. Teachers in district schools were able to scaffold students' learning from one year to the next due to their knowledge of the students and the opportunity for collaboration between Year 6 and Year 7 teaching staff. It is important that the gap between primary and secondary teacher pedagogy is reduced. This might happen if there were more communication between primary and secondary teachers (Jindal-Snape and Foggie, 2008), a suggestion that has been emphasised throughout this research.

Schools.

While teachers have a vital role in supporting students during transition, the school a student attends also plays an important role. The present research identified that a lack of communication occurred between primary and secondary schools, as well as a lack of curriculum continuity and awareness in regards to the development of appropriate transition programs and literacy practices for external transitioning schools. These findings support

previous research, which state that a disparity exists between the structural, and teaching and learning aspects of primary and secondary schools (Galton et al., 1999; Pendergast, 2006).

Research has suggested that one of the commonly reported problems faced by students during the transition phase is the physical separation of the primary and secondary environments (Hawk & Hill, 2001). As discussed previously, within the present research, students who did not change schools experienced fewer academic declines than students who moved to a new secondary campus, indicating that school organisation had an important influence on students' success during transition.

In terms of teaching and learning, primary and secondary schools are very different. Traditionally, primary schools are smaller and more personalised learning environments than secondary schools (West et al., 2010). With the exception of specialised subjects such as physical education, music or drama, primary students generally work with one teacher in one classroom for the day in a flexible, group-orientated and integrated learning environment where individual needs can be catered for and readily addressed (Ferguson & Fraser, 1999; Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009). The structure of secondary schools, however, is quite different. The flexible learning environments prominent in primary schools are replaced by routines, timetables and an individualised approach to learning. Integration is replaced by subject specialisation and students may be taught a number of subjects by a number of teachers within a single day.

In addition to the physical differences between primary and secondary schools, disparities also exist in regards to curriculum delivery, as has been discussed previously in this chapter. Primary schools deliver the curriculum through a student-centred, experiential approach, whereas secondary school curriculum instruction is regarded as more didactic (McGee et al., 2004; Pendergast, 2006; Topping, 2011). Research has found that many primary and secondary schools are not aware of what is happening in each other's systems

and communication between primary and secondary schools has emerged as a key issue for schools (Galton et al., 1999).

Programs that reduce the divide between primary and secondary schools, in regards to physical aspects and curriculum delivery are essential for promoting successful transition for students (Hawk & Hill, 2001). Such programs could include transition programs designed by both primary and secondary schools which address the structural and academic demands of secondary school, increased communication between primary and secondary school staff in order to build relationships between the schools, as well as curriculum awareness and continuity (Galton et al., 1999).

Family life.

As the present research identified, schools and teachers play a vital role in promoting successful transition experiences for students, providing academic and social support within the school and classroom environments. When examining the success of students within a wider framework, the role of the family also needs to be considered. Having adequate external support networks is a crucial factor in successful transition (McGee et al., 2004; Sawyer et al., 2001). Previous research (Mizelle, 2005; Topping, 2011) identified that family support is linked to a students' level of achievement following transition, whereby family support can have a direct influence on the level of success students will experience when moving from primary to secondary school.

Research has found that, when parents are involved in their child's secondary experiences, students are more successful, settled, and less likely to drop out of school (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). As mentioned previously, when students enter adolescence, relationships with parents and family become less important and relationships with peers become increasingly important (Topping, 2011). Therefore, parents and families

are required to work hard to ensure parent/child relationships are maintained. Parental involvement in school activities tends to wane once students enter secondary school, however teachers and administrators need to involve parents in the transition process and their child's education (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Support provided by parents could include having appropriate resources in the home (such as reading books), a designated study area for children/adolescents, discussing school work with their child(ren) and parent involvement in school activities (McGee et al., 2004).

A child's home environment also plays a role in their success at school. Students from low SES families may not receive the same level of support from their parents that students from middle or high SES areas receive, particularly in the area of parental encouragement (McGee, 2004). It has been noted that, if a child's home environment is not aligned with the expectations of the school environment, then parental support is less likely to be effective. Parents from low SES areas have been found to be less involved in their children's education (McGee et al., 2004), and the limited resources in low SES households can also contribute to the difficulties faced by students. As a result, students may not develop the sufficient skills needed for secondary school education, as can be seen by their poorer reading scores when compared with children from high SES families. This is problematic, as reading is regarded as indicative of overall achievement and, therefore, if students have not developed the necessary reading skills prior to secondary school, they will find the demands of secondary school difficult. The relationship between SES and student achievement was explored in the present research and is discussed further in a later section.

The community.

In addition to the importance of the family on adolescent students' success, the community also plays an important role in supporting students during transition. Community

support networks external to the school are often separated from students' school experiences; however, communities need to be actively involved in the education process. Successful transition is dependent upon a number of integrated factors involving teachers, schools, families and the community, supporting Vygotsky's notion of collaborative learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Support for students across the transition phase is compromised if interactions between these networks are insufficient or not in place, in addition to family poverty and low parental engagement (Butler et al., 2005). Therefore, active and effective partnerships need to be constructed between teachers, schools, families and the community, and this is particularly important for low SES communities where interaction between these systems are low.

The SES of a student's community is an important contributing factor to the success the student will have academically across the transition phase. The SES of a community is also a strong predictor of student achievement and it has been found that students from low SES communities find the transition phase more challenging than students from high SES communities (McGee et al., 2004). These findings were echoed in the present research, which identified that students from low SES schools experienced greater declines in their reading achievement during transition than students from middle or high SES schools.

Students from low income communities are twice as likely to underachieve at school and demonstrate declines in academic performance and motivation during the transition phase (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006) and those students who find the transition most difficult are those who were not adequately prepared due to a lack of family or parental support, as discussed previously. Students who come from low SES communities where people may be less educated, unemployed or may not value education, might not receive the social support needed to positively affect students' aspirations as they progress through school (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). This can lead to declines in motivation. Low performers may also

have a narrow range of support people and may not have the peer support base that many high SES students have. Students from high SES communities have been found to have more successful transition experiences socially and academically (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003).

It has been claimed that the school a child attends will have a considerable impact on their future life success (Burgess et al., 2008) and, therefore, students attending schools in low SES areas will have a different educational experience than students from middle or high SES schools. Within Australia, parents have a choice as to which secondary school they would like their child(ren) to attend. Students from high SES families are more likely to attend the elite schools as higher incomes enable school choice. As a result, schools located in low income areas attract students from low income families, many of whom are already at risk of underachievement. This further complicates the transition phase for these students who are already disadvantaged. This is evidence of the *Matthew effect* where students who are already successful in school work, such as in reading, will continue to improve in reading, but those students who are underachieving in reading will continue to underachieve if they are not provided with the required support (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003).

As was evident from the findings of the present research, the community has a large role to play in the experiences students will have during their transition. Schooling experiences that engage the whole community – students, teachers, schools and families – can provide students with the support needed at this important stage of their education. This type of support was evident in School 7 (a middle SES, district school), as students from this school were part of a community that included teachers, parents and schools working together to provide supportive educational communities. This strong community, which was made possible due to the structure of the school, could be regarded as one of the contributing factors towards the success students from School 7 had in regards to their reading and spelling achievement across transition. In comparison, students who transitioned externally

may not have had this community support, as peer groups would be separated when students changed campuses and familiar primary school teachers would be replaced by numerous, unfamiliar secondary school teachers.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a discussion of the research findings for the present research, which was an investigation into the impact that transition had upon adolescent students' reading and spelling achievement. Students' reading and spelling achievement data were gathered quantitatively from the *PART-R* and the *SWST* achievement tests. Teacher data were also gathered from a series of semi-structured interviews with primary, secondary and district school teachers.

This chapter reviewed each of the six Research Questions as outlined in Chapter 1 and provided a summary of the key research findings, in addition to a detailed discussion of the findings for each individual research question, with relevant links to existing literature. It was identified that the transition phase did impact the reading achievement of adolescent students, with students' reading achievement decreasing significantly from Year 6 to Year 7. In comparison, students' spelling achievement made a steady increase across transition. Three key themes were also discussed and it was found that there was a common belief amongst teachers that an increase in curriculum continuity and awareness, communication and teacher support were needed to facilitate successful transition experiences.

Next, this chapter provided a discussion of the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative data through an examination of schools at the individual level. It was noted that students from schools that promoted curriculum continuity and awareness, engaged in high levels of communication and provided high levels of teacher support, were more successful in their reading and spelling achievement across the transition phase. The chapter

then focused on the three key themes identified from this research and proposed that these key themes constituted a trilogy of practices for transition success: curriculum continuity and awareness, communication and teacher support. In this section, it was proposed that these themes were interrelated: a combination of these themes and practices is essential for the promotion of successful transition experiences for students.

The second half of this chapter provided a context for the findings derived from the quantitative and qualitative data, and positioned the current research findings within a wider framework. While each of the three key themes was important for transition preparation, it was acknowledged that these factors sit within a wider framework for adolescents' transition success. It was identified that while schools and teachers play an important role in supporting adolescents across transition, additional factors such as adolescent development, families and the wider community also play a role, and this was shown diagrammatically in the successful transition model.

Finally, this chapter concluded by proposing that successful transition experiences are not due to one single factor, but to a combination of many factors. These include factors that are student based, school based, home and family based as well as community based.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This research was an investigation of the transition phase, the move students make from primary school to secondary school, and the impact this can have on adolescent students' literacy achievement. Previous research literature proposed that the transition phase is a particularly significant time for young students and, although many researchers have investigated the topic of transition, there was still a great deal which needed to be understood in regards to how the transition impacts adolescents. In particular, why it poses difficulties for so many students. This research endeavoured to fill this gap through an investigation of two main aims. First, the study aimed to identify the impact of transition upon adolescent students' literacy achievement in the areas of reading and spelling, as determined by the *PAT-R* and the *SWST*. Second, this research sought to identify the types of programs and practices that primary, secondary and district school teachers were using in their classrooms to prepare their students for the transition phase and the transition into secondary school literacy. Teachers' perceptions of transition were also examined to identify their practices, programs and also their suggestions for how the transition phase could be improved for students.

This chapter presents a summary of the research project. It begins with an overview of the research, and then proceeds with a brief discussion of the main findings in relation to each of the research questions. The significance of the research is discussed and recommendations are then presented for educational professionals in the areas of policy, practice and research. Finally, this chapter concludes with some final remarks about literacy, about transition and about adolescents.

Research Overview

The research was conducted in ten, coeducational government schools across the state of Tasmania. These schools varied in terms of SES and school type, and included primary schools (*N*=4), secondary schools (*N*=3) and district schools (*N*=3). To determine the impact of transition upon students' literacy achievement, 244 adolescent students participated in a testing process on two occasions: once when they were in their final year of primary school (Year 6) and again when they were in their first year of secondary school (Year 7). To complement the student test data, teacher data were also collected to determine their perceptions of the transition phase as well as the types of programs and practices they were using in their classrooms to teach literacy and to prepare students for the transition phase. Nineteen teacher participants took part in one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the researcher. A mixed methods approach was used as the method of data collection and analysis. Student test scores were analysed quantitatively using SPSS.18, whereby individual levels of analysis were conducted on the independent variables. Teacher interview data were analysed using qualitative methods through a process of thematic analysis.

Summary of Findings

A number of key findings were obtained from the research investigation. These have been summarised below and, as was done in previous chapters, are presented in accordance to each research question:

Research Question 1: Does the transition from primary school into secondary school have an impact upon adolescent students' literacy achievement as determined by the PAT-R and SWST?

Findings from the research revealed that the transition phase did have an impact upon the reading achievement of young adolescent students as they moved from Year 6 into Year 7. Analysis of the overall sample revealed that students' *PAT-R* achievement significantly declined during the transition phase. Analysis at the individual school level revealed that the level of decline varied amongst the participating schools, with students' in some schools experienced greater reading declines than others. Only one school in the study, a middle SES, district school where students transitioned internally, experienced an increase in *PAT-R* achievement across transition.

In comparison to the above findings, analysis of the overall sample revealed that students' *SWST* scores remained steady from Year 6 to Year 7. At the individual school level, students' *SWST* scores varied, with three schools experiencing declines in their spelling achievement. The results from both the overall and individual analyses were, however, not significant. These results suggest that transition does not appear to have a negative influence on students' spelling achievement.

Research Question 2: Do students who transition into secondary school externally experience greater declines in their literacy achievement as determined by the PAT-R and the SWST than students who transition into secondary school internally?

The research revealed that type of transition did have an impact upon the literacy achievement of students. In regards to reading achievement, it was found that students who transitioned externally experienced significantly larger declines in their *PAT-R* achievement scores than students who transitioned internally. In regards to spelling, it was found that students who transitioned internally experienced greater increases in their *SWST* scores across transition than those who transitioned externally.

Research Question 3: Do students from schools in high socioeconomic areas perform better on the PAT-R and SWST than students from schools situated in low socioeconomic areas during the transition phase?

Exploration of the relationship between SES, transition and literacy achievement revealed that overall, students attending schools in high SES areas achieved significantly higher *PAT-R* scores than students attending schools in middle and low SES areas post transition. It was also found that students from low SES schools experienced the greatest decline in their *PAT-R* achievement across transition, followed by students from high SES schools. Students from schools located in middle SES areas did not experience increases or declines in their *PAT-R* achievement.

In regards to spelling, the overall analysis revealed that students attending low, middle and high SES schools experienced a similar increase in *SWST* achievement across transition. Similar to the findings above, students from schools situated in high SES areas achieved the highest *SWST* scores across the transition phase. Even so, students from low SES schools experienced the greatest increase in *SWST* scores across transition, followed by middle SES schools. Interestingly, the smallest increase in *SWST* scores was made from students attending high SES schools.

Research Question 4: What literacy practices and programs do primary school, secondary school and district school teachers use to prepare adolescent students for the demands of secondary school literacy?

An important finding that emerged from this research was that primary and secondary school teachers were unaware of the types of programs and practices used in each other's schools. As a result, these teachers reported a lack of curriculum continuity and curriculum awareness between the two school systems. This was especially noted in how the secondary

teachers used set books and novels as part of their reading programs. This lack of curriculum continuity was less reported as a problem by district school teachers.

Teacher interview data revealed that methods of literacy instruction varied between primary, secondary and district school teachers. Primary school teachers reportedly used a student-centred approach for literacy instruction in their classrooms that included the teaching of specific reading, writing and spelling skills. Similar methods were reported by the district school teachers. Secondary teachers indicated that they used an individualised, discipline-based approach, which had a strong focus on writing. Explicit teaching of reading and spelling skills was not a priority for some of the secondary teachers.

Research Question 5: What methods do primary school, secondary school and district school teachers use to prepare students for the transition phase?

The research revealed that methods of transition preparation varied between teachers and between schools. All teachers reported that their students participated in orientation programs. Additionally, all teachers stated that they provided support for students who were at risk. Interestingly, explicit transition programs were only used by the secondary and district school teachers, with many primary school teachers reporting that they did not do anything to prepare their students for the transition phase. The teacher interviews revealed that methods of transition preparation between primary and secondary schools were dominated by secondary school staff and that primary school teachers were not actively involved in the transition preparation process. This was less the case in the district schools, as teachers were found to have a collaborative approach to transition preparation.

Research Question 6: What methods do teachers perceive as being most necessary for the promotion of literacy development in adolescent learners across the transition phase?

The teacher participants believed that an increase in teacher support was essential in enabling them to support their students more effectively during the transition phase. All primary, secondary and district school teachers reported that regular staff meetings, sharing resources, identifying areas for improvement, collegial support, increased teacher's aide time and increased planning time would enable them to better prepare students for the transition phase. Three common themes emerged from the teacher interview data as priorities for facilitating and promoting effective transition: increased teacher support, increased communication and increased curriculum continuity and awareness. These were discussed in detail in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Significance of the Research

In their examination of the transition into senior secondary school, Reyes et al. (2000) found that a post transition drop of a full letter grade can put the average student dangerously close to failing, essentially sealing the fate of a student who is already achieving below grade level. These findings suggest that students' experiences during the transition phase can have a detrimental effect on their learning and on their future success throughout school. Therefore, research into the transition phase is essential in developing understandings for how to improve the transition experience for students, particularly those students who are at risk of underachievement. As has been mentioned previously, although transition has been a topic on the research agenda for some time, reports of students' difficulties across transition are still emerging as a central concern and, therefore, research needs to continue in this area to address these concerns. This research is significant as it adds to the existing body of literature that explores the transition phase and the impact it can have on young adolescents, while also bringing something unique to the field across a number of areas.

First, the findings from this study enable new data from an Australian setting to be brought into light. While transition research has previously been explored in Australian schools (Hanewald, 2013; Towns, 2011), it has been done on a minimal basis and most of what is known about transition comes from research conducted in the Unites States (Alspaugh, 1998; Benner, 2011; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Reyes et al., 2000), the United Kingdom (Galton et al., 1999; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Topping, 2011; West et al., 2010), as well as in New Zealand (Cox & Kennedy, 2008), where the transition process occurs at different stages in a students' education.

Second, this research is a multilayered study and has attempted to bring together and fill some of the existing gaps related to transition and adolescents' literacy achievement by examining a number of variables such as student achievement (specifically reading and spelling), type of transition (internal or external), type of school (primary, secondary and district), SES and teacher practice (programs and practices). This layered approach differs from much of the existing transition literature that has explored these variables individually, rather than collaboratively, within the one study.

The research also brings together the relationship between transition and literacy achievement, and contributes to the understanding that the transition phase is a major contributing factor towards a students' literacy achievement in secondary school. Finally, through the use of a mixed methods research approach, this research explored the impact of transition on students' literacy achievement, and provided insights into the types of practices teachers were using in their classrooms in an attempt to understand and identify the literacy practices and how they relate to, and the consequences of these for, students' achievement.

Future Research and Recommendations

This research adds to the current understandings of young adolescents' achievement in reading and spelling across the transition phase. It also provides an insight into teachers' perspectives of transition and their methods of literacy instruction. In light of previous research and findings from the present study, it is evident that there is still a great deal to be done to improve the transition experience for students and also teachers. On the basis of previous research findings and the findings from the present study, it can be concluded that the transition phase continues to be an area of difficulty for many students in terms of reading achievement. Therefore, this research proposes a number of recommendations for future research and for professional practice.

Future research priorities.

Topping (2011) proposed that future research into the area of transition should include both student tests to determine academic attainment changes and teacher perceptions, not simply one or the other. The present research was designed around such an approach, whereby student test scores and the perceptions of teachers were explored. To further enhance transition investigations, this research proposes the following suggestions for future research:

1. A central priority for future research is to investigate how students can be supported academically across the transition phase, by schools, teachers and education departments. Despite previous research that has identified why the transition phase can cause academic difficulties for students and declines in their achievement (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006), particularly for those students who are already at risk of underachievement in school, future research needs to place a focus on *how* to support

those students during transition. Literacy programs, practices and initiatives need to be developed which will promote adolescents' retention and academic success throughout their schooling.

2. Minimal research currently exists that explores the relationship between adolescents' reading achievement across the transition phase. Further research is needed in this area to develop our understandings for how to support adolescents' reading achievement across transition. Such research could also include a focus on reading achievement across the curriculum and focus on other literacy skills, such as writing and multi-literacies.
3. Specific research is still needed into why some adolescents experience reading achievement declines across the transition phase and why others do not. Such research could include assessing students' achievement on a variety of reading tests at different points and in different subjects throughout the school year, rather than using one single reading test, as was the case with the present research.
4. Further studies could also examine students' reading achievement across the transition phase in district schools to determine why students who transition internally retain their achievement levels better than students who transition externally. Such findings could be translated into methods other schools could use to promote successful transition in their own setting. Currently there is relatively little research in this area (Towns, 2011).
5. Further investigations into primary, secondary and district school teachers' practices are needed to identify the types of programs and practices that promote successful transition experiences and those that may hinder students' achievement. Although there is literature that has examined transition programs, many of these programs are

aimed at supporting students on a social, emotional and administrative level, rather than supporting students academically.

6. Finally, this research was multi-layered and examined the impact of transition across a number of variables. It would be interesting to replicate aspects of this research using a larger sample size, with a greater number of student and teacher participants. Such investigations could be conducted in other parts of Australia or extended to international settings.

Professional practice.

In addition to the recommendations for future research outlined above, this research also proposes a number of recommendations for professional practice in the following areas:

Policy.

The present research has contributed to research findings that suggest that the declines in achievement across the transition phase can have a detrimental effect on students' future achievement in school and beyond the classroom (Hawk & Hill, 2001; McGee et al., 2004). Therefore, support at the policy level is needed to ensure transition is a priority on the education agenda and to guide school boards, principals and teachers in addressing the specific literacy needs of early adolescent learners as they transition from primary to secondary school. The following recommendations are suggested:

- Programs and initiatives aimed at improving the literacy achievement for young adolescents should be recognised as a priority. Such programs need to look at how student achievement can be sustained from Year 6 to Year 7.

- Educational policies should support and promote transition initiatives and address issues of school funding, adequate teacher support and a curriculum that promotes continuous learning.
- Educational policies should ensure that curriculum documents reflect the importance of continuity in the curriculum and provide concrete examples for how schools and teachers can deliver this curriculum in their classrooms to promote a seamless transition, and greater understanding of the middle schooling philosophy and practices

Education departments.

While research and government initiatives have proposed a number of strategies, programs and practices to improve the transition phase and improve students' literacy capabilities, this research has indicated that more needs to be done in this area. The following recommendations are proposed:

- Programs need to be put in place that support students' reading achievement across the transition phase, particularly for those students who are at risk of failing or falling behind.
- Assistance needs to be provided to schools in developing teaching and learning strategies that will address the needs of adolescent students in the area of reading and promote effective reading programs that continue from one school year to the next.

Faculties of education/teacher education.

University faculties or schools of education have a responsibility to ensure teachers are trained to deliver quality education of the highest standard, which address the needs of all students. Faculties of education need to:

- Recognise the importance of young adolescent education and provide professional learning opportunities for teachers in training which specifically address the transition years.
- The education of students in the middle years should be a focus within all education degrees.
- Teachers need ongoing professional training to teach adolescents students in accordance to their learning needs.

Schools/principals.

Schools need to place a greater focus on the transition phase and make it a priority to implement support for both students and teachers. Schools can play a significant role in supporting students during the transition phase and, therefore, the following is recommended:

- School principals need to ensure that transition interventions begin early in the school year and continue for a longer duration.
- Liaison and productive linkages should be established between primary and secondary schools. This is particularly important for schools on separate campuses, whereby students transition externally.
- Primary schools need to have an active role in transition preparation and work with secondary schools in preparing programs and activities that will support students.

- School principals should encourage active communication with their feeder schools in regards to literacy programs and practices, transition preparation, and individual student information.
- School principals need to ensure teachers receive professional learning and ongoing support to teach, engage, and motivate adolescents in reading during the transition years. This requires providing staff with adequate planning time as well as high quality and specific professional development learning opportunities.
- Primary and secondary schools need to have programs in place that promote reading development. Reading should be taught explicitly at both the primary and secondary level, and reading programs should target the needs of individual students. Specific programs should be in place for students at risk. Reading programs need to be consistent between primary and secondary schools.

Teachers.

Teachers play a very important role in ensuring their students adjust to their new secondary school environment (Dinham & Rowe, 2008), and teachers are regarded as the main source of achievement for students (Hattie, 2003; 2009). This research identified that many Year 6 and Year 7 teachers were unsure how to prepare and assist students during transition, and many were unaware of the specific learning needs of adolescents in literacy. The following recommendations are suggested for teachers working with young adolescent students:

- Year 6 and Year 7 teachers need to make transition a priority in their classrooms.

- Teachers need to be aware of the appropriate pedagogy, teaching strategies, frameworks, programs and practices to support adolescents' literacy development across transition.
- Teachers need to ensure they meet the needs of individual students, particularly those identified as at risk, through the use of exceptional programs, monitoring and evaluation, tracking student achievement and providing authentic assessment opportunities.
- Primary and secondary school teachers need to ensure they communicate and network with each other on a regular basis. Communication should involve sharing the programs and practices used in their classrooms, working together to develop approaches for teaching reading and literacy across the transition years, working together to support students across transition more generally, sharing resources, working in each other's classrooms, sharing student information and identifying students at risk.
- Teachers need to identify and address their own learning needs and ensure they have a willingness to learn, try new approaches and participate in professional development.
- Teachers need to develop classrooms that support young adolescent learners. Teachers should encourage relationship building between students, establish clear guidelines for behaviour, encourage cooperation, draw upon students' strengths (Dinham & Rowe, 2008), develop activities and assessments that relate learning to students' lives, facilitate engaging and motivating learning opportunities and make students feel safe and valued.

Research Limitations

When considering the results from this research, it is important to acknowledge that there were some limitations associated with this study and that these should be taken into account when considering the research findings. Limitations of this research included:

1. The study included a sample of student (*N*=244) and teacher (*N* =19) participants, from only one Australian State: Tasmania, whose structures, practices, and policy may not be reflective of the full Australian educational context. Therefore, the achievement levels of students and the views expressed by the teachers may be unique to this sample.
2. Student literacy attainment across transition was measured using standardised test instruments that measured students on two elements of literacy: reading and spelling. While these tests were chosen due to their reliability and validity, such tests did not enable other areas of literacy skills to be measured, such as writing, disciplinary literacies or multiliteracies.
3. This research focused on reading and spelling achievement. A student's success at school and a successful transition cannot be measured by these two skills alone. A student's ability in other areas of the curriculum, as well as social and emotional development, must also be acknowledged and encouraged in order to determine what constitutes a successful transition experience.
4. The age at which students in Tasmanian schools engage in transition is different to students from other parts of Australia, and also in many other countries. Therefore, students who transition at different stages may have slightly different educational outcomes. In addition, teachers may also use different transition/literacy practices in their classrooms, depending on the age at which transition occurs.

5. The research was conducted in Tasmanian schools and, while efforts were made to include schools from different geographical contexts, the participating schools were from the government sector and therefore other educational sectors such as the Catholic and the Independent school system were not represented.
6. A final limitation of this research was an absence of an exploration of students' perspectives of the transition phase. This was beyond the scope of the present research. An exploration of students' perceptions and experiences of the transition phase is an area for future research.

Although these limitations are valid and need to be taken into consideration, the results from this study present a number of important findings in the relationship between students' literacy achievement and the transition to secondary school. Such findings could be further explored and it would be valuable to conduct similar investigations using a larger sample size and a range of schools across Australia from both the government and private departments.

Concluding Comments

The transition from primary school to secondary school may be considered a normal event for adolescent students, something they must undergo in order to complete their education. As the previous literature indicates and this research has highlighted, while transition may be a standard part of students' schooling, it can be quite problematic for many students (Benner, 2011). The literacy success a young adolescent will experience during the transition phase can have a lasting effect beyond the transition years and beyond school. It has been suggested throughout this thesis that there is still a great deal that needs to be done in regards to improving and enhancing students' literacy achievement during transition.

Further research should build on the strengths and limitations of the existing research in this area.

The present research was conducted with the aim of developing further understandings of why many adolescent students continue to struggle in their literacy achievement as they progress through secondary school, what is causing the struggle, and how the problem can be addressed. It is hoped that the findings of this research will be of scholarly and practical interest to education departments, principals, teachers, parents and other members of the educational community who are interested in improving the literacy achievement of young adolescents. School transitions will continue to be a part of all student's educational careers and, therefore, transition needs to be considered as more than just an orientation activity, but given a priority in ongoing communication and programming between Australian primary and secondary schools. It is the responsibility of researchers, educators and policy workers to work together to prevent student academic decline and to promote successful learning experiences for all young adolescent students. A key step in achieving this positive learning for all students is a positive and meaningful transition from a primary school learning environment to a secondary school learning environment that values the needs of students as they take a monumental step in their educational career.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Department of Education
EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE SERVICES

2/99 Bathurst Street, Hobart
GPO Box 169, Hobart, TAS 7001 Australia

Tasmania

File: 1267970

3 August 2011

Professor Ian Hay
Dean of the Faculty of Education
University of Tasmania
Locked Bag 1308
Launceston TAS 7250

Dear Professor Hay

Teachers' Perceptions of Successful Transition into English from Primary School to High School

I have been advised by the Educational Performance Report Committee that the above research study adheres to the guidelines established and that there is no objection to the study proceeding.

Please note that you have been given permission to proceed at a general level, and not at individual school level. You must still seek approval from the principals of the selected schools before you can proceed with your study.

A copy of your final report should be forwarded to Educational Performance Services, Department of Education, GPO Box 169, Hobart, 7001 at your earliest convenience and within six months of the completion of the research phase.

Yours sincerely

Manager
(Educational Performance Services)
cc. Belinda Hopwood.

Social Science Ethics Officer
Private Bag 01 Hobart
Tasmania 7001 Australia
Tel: (03) 6226 2764
Fax: (03) 6226 7148
Marilyn.Knott@utas.edu.au

UTAS

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA) NETWORK

12 October 2010

Professor Ian Hay
Faculty of Education
Private Bag 1308
Launceston Tasmania

Dear Professor Hay

Re: MINIMAL RISK ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL
Ethics Reference: **H11489 - Teachers' perceptions of successful transition into English from Primary School to High School.**

Acting on a mandate from the Tasmania Social Sciences HREC, the Chair of the committee considered and approved the above project on 11 October 2010.

Please note that this approval is for four years and is conditional upon receipt of an annual Progress Report. Ethics approval for this project will lapse if a Progress Report is not submitted.

The following conditions apply to this approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval.

1. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval, to ensure the project is conducted as approved by the Ethics Committee, and to notify the Committee if any investigators are added to, or cease involvement with, the project.

2. Complaints: If any complaints are received or ethical issues arise during the course of the project, investigators should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee on 03 6226 7479 or human.ethics@utas.edu.au.

3. Incidents or adverse effects: Investigators should notify the Ethics Committee immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

A PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Appendix B: Information Letters and Consent Forms

Locked Bag 1307 Launceston
Tasmania 7250 Australia
Phone (03) 6324 3263 Fax (03) 6324 3048
www.utas.edu.au/educ

UTAS

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

PRINCIPAL INFORMATION SHEET
SOCIAL SCIENCE/ HUMANITITES
RESEARCH

Title: *Teachers Perceptions of Successful Transition into English from Primary School to High School.*

Invitation
You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the transition of students from primary school into high school, with a specific focus on effective curriculum transition from primary to secondary school in the domain of English/Literacy.

The study is being conducted in partial fulfilment of a PhD degree for Belinda Hopwood under the supervision of:

Professor Ian Hay	Dean of Education	UTAS
Associate Professor Geraldine Castleton	Head of School	UTAS

1. 'What is the purpose of this study?'

The purpose of this study is to examine effective transition into English from primary school into high school.

The study will be undertaken through an investigation of the English/literacy practices used by primary school and high school teachers in K-6, K-12 and 7-10 schools. Information will be gathered from interviews with year 6 and year 7 teachers.

2. 'Why has your school been invited to participate in this study?'

Your school is eligible to participate in this study because this study is examining a range of schools across Tasmania in both rural and regional settings.

3. 'What does this study involve?'

The study will involve a series of interviews conducted with teachers in both primary schools and high schools. Year 6 and Year 7 teachers will be interviewed individually in regards to their perception of the transition phase and the practices they use in order to prepare students for English at the secondary level.

It is important that you understand that your school's involvement is this study is voluntary. While we would be pleased to have your school participate, we respect your right to decline. There will be no consequences to you or your school if you decide not to participate. If you decide to discontinue participation at any time, you may do so without providing an explanation. All information will be

treated in a confidential manner, and your name or your school's name will not be used in any publication arising out of the research. All of the research will be kept in a locked cabinet at the University of Tasmanian Hobart Campus for 5 years after publication after which time disposition of the data will occur at the discretion of the Chief Investigator.

4. Are there any possible benefits from participation in this study?
Researchers and educators are continually reporting a drop in the literacy achievements of many students as they make the transition from primary school into secondary school. Participation in this study will enable important research to be conducted in this area in order to identify effective literacy practices and programs which will enable students to make successful transitions from primary school into high school. The identification of such practices and programs will enable teachers to enhance their literacy teaching and ensure students do not get left behind as they transition through secondary school.

5. Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?
There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study.

6. What if I have questions about this research?
If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study please feel free to contact Professor Ian Hay Ian.Hay@utas.edu.au, Associate Professor Geraldine Castleton Geraldine.Castleton@utas.edu.au or student investigator Belinda Hopwood hopwoodb@utas.edu.au. We would be happy to discuss any aspects of the research with you. Once we have analysed the information we will be emailing you and your school a summary of our findings. You are welcome to contact us at that time to discuss any issue relating to the research study.

This study has been approved by the Tasmanian Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study should contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 7479 or email human.ethics@utas.edu.au. The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. You will need to quote [*HREC project number*].

Thank you for taking the time to consider this study.
If you wish to take part in it, please sign the attached consent form.
This information sheet is for you to keep.

Locked Bag 1307 Launceston
Tasmania 7250 Australia
Phone (03) 6324 3263 Fax (03) 6324 3048
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UTAS

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

CONSENT FORM

Title: *Teachers Perceptions of Successful Transition into English from Primary School to High School.*

1. I have read and understood the 'Information Sheet' for this project.
2. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
3. I understand that the study involves teachers of year 6 and year 7 classes who will be involved in interviews conducted by student investigator Belinda Hopwood.
4. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the University of Tasmania premises for at least five years, and will then be destroyed when no longer required.
5. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
6. I agree that research data gathered from me for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a participant.
7. I understand that the researchers will maintain my identity confidential and that any information I supply to the researcher will be used only for the purposes of the research.
8. I agree to my school participating in this investigation and understand that I may withdraw it at any time without any effect.

Name of School:	Name of Principal:
Signature:	Date:

Statement by Investigator

☐ I have explained the project & the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

☐ The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Name of Investigator: *Belinda Hopwood*

Signature of Investigator_____Date_____

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UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET
SOCIAL SCIENCE/ HUMANITITES
RESEARCH

TITLE: *Teachers Perceptions of Successful Transition into English from Primary School to High School.*

Invitation
You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the transition of students from primary school into secondary school, with a specific focus on effective curriculum transition from primary school to high school in the domain of English/Literacy

The study is being conducted in partial fulfilment of a PhD degree for Belinda Hopwood under the supervision of:

Professor Ian Hay	Dean of Education	UTAS
Associate Professor Geraldine Castleton	Head of School	UTAS

1. 'What is the purpose of this study?'

The purpose of this study is to examine effective transition into English from primary school into high school.

The study will be undertaken through an investigation of the English/literacy practices used by primary school and high school teachers in K-6, K-12 and 7-10 schools. Information will be gathered from interviews with year 6 and year 7 teachers.

2. 'Why have I been invited to participate in this study?'
You are eligible to participate in this study because you either:

- Teach year 6 students
- Teach 7 English h
- Hold the current Head of English position at your school

3. 'What does this study involve?'
You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview consisting of key focus questions in regards to your own teaching practices and the practices you use to prepare students for the English/literacy demands of high school. It is expected that the interview will take no longer than 60 minutes. It will take place at your workplace or at another venue appropriate to you. The interview will be audio recorded, however, if you are uncomfortable with this, handwritten notes can be taken. A transcript of the interview will be emailed to you to confirm or amend.

It is important that you understand that your involvement is this study is voluntary. While we would be pleased to have you participate, we respect your right to decline. There will be no consequences to you if you decide not to participate. If you decide to discontinue participation at any time, you may do so without providing an explanation. All information will be treated in a confidential manner, and your name will not be used in any publication arising out of the research. All of the research will be kept in a locked cabinet at the University of Tasmanian Hobart Campus for 5 years after publication, after which time disposition of the data will occur at the discretion of the Chief Investigator.

4. Are there any possible benefits from participation in this study?
This study will provide you with the opportunity to express your views, ideas and your own teaching practices regarding educating students in English and in the process of transition. This may assist you to reflect on your own practices as well as whole school practices in regards to improving the transition experience for students and improving student English/literacy outcomes.

The overall benefit of this study will be the identification of effective literacy programs and practices which teachers and educators will be able to use to enable students to make successful transitions into high school. The identification of such practices and programs will enable teachers to enhance their literacy teaching and ensure students do not fall behind in the domain of literacy as they make the transition from primary school into high school.

5. Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?
There are no specific risks anticipated with participation in this study.

6. What if I have questions about this research?
If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study please feel free to contact Professor Ian Hay Ian.Hay@utas.edu.au, Associate Professor Geraldine Castleton Geraldine.Castleton@utas.edu.au or student investigator Belinda Hopwood hopwoodb@utas.edu.au. We would be happy to discuss any aspect of the research with you. Once we have analysed the information we will be emailing you and your school a summary of our findings. You are welcome to contact us at that time to discuss any issue relating to the research study.

This study has been approved by the Tasmanian Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study should contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on (03) 6226 7479 or email human.ethics@utas.edu.au. The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. [*HREC project number*].

Thank you for taking the time to consider this study.
If you wish to take part in it, please sign the attached consent form.
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UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

TITLE: *Teachers Perceptions of Successful Transition into English from Primary School to High School.*

1. I have read and understood the 'Information Sheet' for this project.
2. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
3. I understand that the study involves a one-on-one, interview, which will be no longer than 60 minutes in duration, with student investigator Belinda Hopwood. I understand that the interview will be audio taped if I give my consent to do so.
4. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the University of Tasmania premises for at least five years, and will then be destroyed when no longer required.
5. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
6. I agree that research data gathered from me for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a participant.
7. I understand that the researchers will maintain my identity confidential and that any information I supply to the researcher will be used only for the purposes of the research.
8. I understand that if I wish, I will be given an opportunity to review and amend a transcript of my interview.
9. I agree to participate in this investigation and understand that I may withdraw at any time without any effect, and if I so wish, may request that any data I have supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

Name of Participant:

Signature: Date:

Statement by Investigator

☐ I have explained the project & the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

☐ The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Name of Investigator: Belinda Hopwood

Signature of Investigator Date

Appendix C: Sample of the *Progressive Achievement Test in Reading (PAT-R)*

PAT-R

COMPREHENSION TEST BOOKLET 7

DIRECTIONS

This is a test of how well you understand what you read. Carefully read each passage and then answer the questions about it before you go on to the next passage. There are four choices for every question. You choose the one answer that you think is best.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

LITTLE PENGUIN

The Little Penguin is an interesting animal. It's a bird, but it doesn't fly. It spends most of its time in the sea looking for food. The Little Penguin is well suited to swimming in the sea because it has a waterproof layer of feathers to keep its body dry.

P1 The Little Penguin is a bird, but it doesn't

A fly.
B swim.
C eat fish.
D lay eggs.

P2 What keeps the Little Penguin's body dry when it is in the water?

A a layer of fat
B a pair of wings
C a layer of feathers
D a pair of webbed feet

The correct answer to **P1** is **A**.

The correct answer to **P2** is **C**.

- You will have 40 minutes to complete the test.
- You may re-read a passage as many times as you need to.
- Remember that you mark only the one best answer for each question.
- If you want to change your answer, rub out your first mark completely, then fill in another bubble to show your new answer.

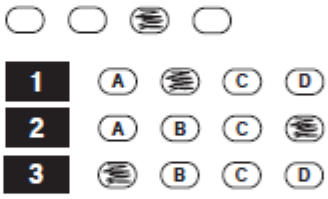
INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ANSWER SHEET

- Use pencil only, preferably 2B.
- Do **not** use a red pen or felt-tip pen.

Start by filling in the information at the top of the Answer Sheet. Your teacher will help you with this.

Please MARK LIKE THIS ONLY:

Example: Mark the bubble corresponding to your answer.

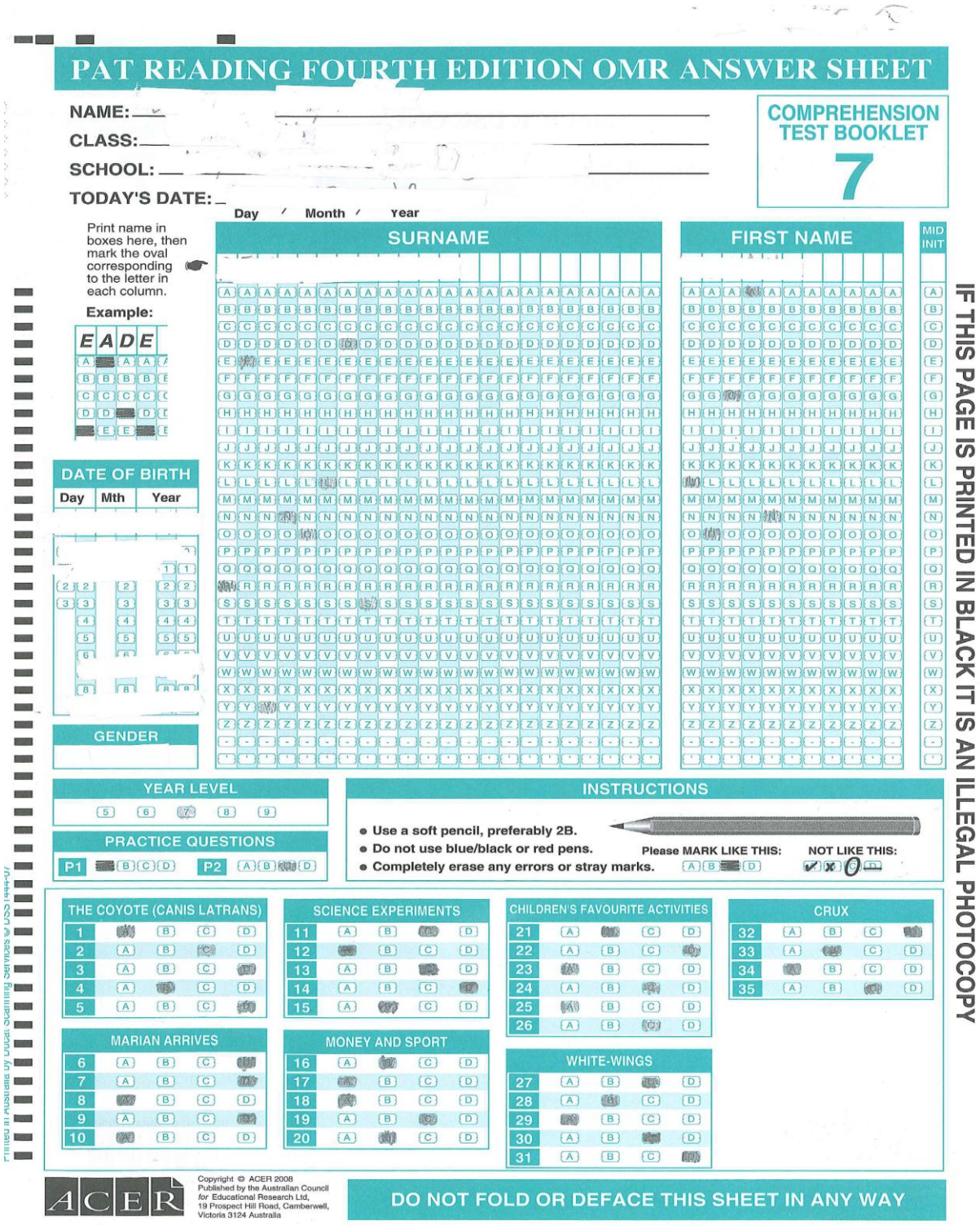


Try each question as you come to it. Work as quickly and carefully as you can. Do not spend too long on one question, even if it is hard. Follow the question numbers down the columns on your Answer Sheet.

If you want to write something to help you find an answer to a question, use some spare paper – do not write on the question booklet.

DO NOT TURN THE PAGE UNTIL YOU ARE TOLD TO DO SO.

Sample *Progressive Achievement Test in Reading* Answer Sheet



PAT READING FOURTH EDITION OMR ANSWER SHEET

NAME:

CLASS:

SCHOOL:

TODAY'S DATE: Day / Month / Year

COMPREHENSION TEST BOOKLET 7

Print name in boxes here, then mark the oval corresponding to the letter in each column.

Example: E A D E

SURNAME

FIRST NAME

MID INIT

DATE OF BIRTH

Day Mth Year

GENDER

YEAR LEVEL

5 6 7 8 9

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

P1 B C D

P2 A B D

INSTRUCTIONS

- Use a soft pencil, preferably 2B.
- Do not use blue/black or red pens.
- Completely erase any errors or stray marks.

Please MARK LIKE THIS: A B D

NOT LIKE THIS:

THE COYOTE (CANIS LATRANS)

1	A	B	C	D
2	A	B	C	D
3	A	B	C	D
4	A	B	C	D
5	A	B	C	D

SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS

11	A	B	C	D
12	A	B	C	D
13	A	B	C	D
14	A	B	C	D
15	A	B	C	D

CHILDREN'S FAVOURITE ACTIVITIES

21	A	B	C	D
22	A	B	C	D
23	A	B	C	D
24	A	B	C	D
25	A	B	C	D
26	A	B	C	D

CRUX

32	A	B	C	D
33	A	B	C	D
34	A	B	C	D
35	A	B	C	D

MARIAN ARRIVES

6	A	B	C	D
7	A	B	C	D
8	A	B	C	D
9	A	B	C	D
10	A	B	C	D

MONEY AND SPORT

16	A	B	C	D
17	A	B	C	D
18	A	B	C	D
19	A	B	C	D
20	A	B	C	D

WHITE-WINGS

27	A	B	C	D
28	A	B	C	D
29	A	B	C	D
30	A	B	C	D
31	A	B	C	D

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Appendix D: Sample of the Single Word Spelling Test (SWST)

Test F – 11 years

SWST

SINGLE WORD SPELLING TEST

SENTENCES

		Sentences	Write
Practice word	PLUG	The *plug* stops the water running out of the bath.	PLUG
1	DREAM	Gita had a strange **dream**.	DREAM
2	CHAIR	Grandad sat in a comfortable **chair**.	CHAIR
3	STICKING	Roy was **sticking** photographs into an album.	STICKING
4	BECAUSE	Sarah could not go out **because** it was raining.	BECAUSE
5	NIGHT	The stars can be seen in the sky at **night**.	NIGHT
6	WATCH	Jamie bought a new digital **watch**.	WATCH
7	ADVENTURE	The children had a wonderful **adventure** on the island.	ADVENTURE
8	WRITING	Sarah's **writing** is neat.	WRITING
9	STOPPED	Harry **stopped** playing when he was tired.	STOPPED
10	ALTOGETHER	Three, five and seven make fifteen **altogether**.	ALTOGETHER
11	REPLIED	The doctor asked a question and the patient **replied**.	REPLIED
12	GLASSES	Three **glasses** were filled with lemonade.	GLASSES
13	BRIDGE	The ship sailed under the **bridge**.	BRIDGE
14	INFORMATION	**Information** can be stored on a computer.	INFORMATION
15	DANGEROUS	It is **dangerous** to walk by the edge of the cliffs.	DANGEROUS
16	INSTEAD	Darren went to the football match **instead** of the cinema.	INSTEAD
17	KNEW	Lucy **knew** the answer to the question.	KNEW
18	TREASURE	The pirates found the buried **treasure**.	TREASURE
19	BOUNCING	The ball went **bouncing** across the playground.	BOUNCING
20	RESPECTFUL	The pupils were **respectful** of their teacher.	RESPECTFUL
21	COMPLAINED	The lady **complained** when the bus was late.	COMPLAINED
22	DICTIONARY	The meaning of words can be found in a **dictionary**.	DICTIONARY
23	PARTIES	Some children get invited to lots of **parties**.	PARTIES
24	DISCOVERED	Charles **discovered** that some metals are magnetic.	DISCOVERED
25	HALVES	Two **halves** make one whole.	HALVES

SENTENCES

		Sentences	Write
26	DISUSED	The **disused** railway has been turned into a cycle path.	DISUSED
27	CHURCHES	There are many **churches** in the town.	CHURCHES
28	SEARCH	They had to **search** for the missing dog.	SEARCH
29	ENTERTAINED	The magician **entertained** the children.	ENTERTAINED
30	PARAGRAPHS	The pupils were asked to write in **paragraphs**.	PARAGRAPHS
31	THIRSTY	John drank water because he was **thirsty**.	THIRSTY
32	DAMAGING	The hurricane was **damaging** property.	DAMAGING
33	PLANNING	We are **planning** to go on a camping holiday.	PLANNING
34	LAUGHING	They were **laughing** at the joke.	LAUGHING
35	WORRIED	Sharon was **worried** because she was late for school.	WORRIED
36	MISUNDERSTANDING	The **misunderstanding** occurred because the facts were not explained.	MISUNDERSTANDING
37	ENVIRONMENT	We must not pollute our **environment**.	ENVIRONMENT
38	AUTOMATIC	Mrs Jones bought an **automatic** car.	AUTOMATIC
39	TOMATOES	**Tomatoes** are used to make ketchup.	TOMATOES
40	INVASION	Kathy learned at school about the Roman **invasion** of Britain.	INVASION
41	SURROUNDED	The enemy **surrounded** the castle.	SURROUNDED
42	FAVOURITE	Rajesh was watching his **favourite** television programme.	FAVOURITE
43	CELEBRATIONS	The birthday **celebrations** were fun.	CELEBRATIONS
44	QUIETLY	In a library you should read **quietly**.	QUIETLY
45	POISONOUS	An adder is a **poisonous** snake.	POISONOUS
46	MAGICIAN	The **magician** performed many card tricks.	MAGICIAN
47	CHARACTER	The main **character** in the story was a hero.	CHARACTER
48	RESPONSIBLE	The girls must be **responsible** for their own possessions.	RESPONSIBLE
49	MARVELLOUS	We had a **marvellous** day out in London.	MARVELLOUS
50	CIRCUMFERENCE	The **circumference** of a circle can be measured with string.	CIRCUMFERENCE

Sample SWST Answer Sheet

SPELLINGS

1	dream		26	disused	
2	chair		27	churches	
3	sticking		28	search	
4	because		29	entertained	
5	night		30	paragraphs	
6	watch		31	thirsty	
7	adventure		32	damaging	
8	writing		33	planning	
9	stopped		34	laughing	
10	altogether		35	worried	
11	replied		36	misunderstanding	
12	glasses		37	environment	
13	bridge		38	automatic	
14	information		39	tomatoes	
15	dangerous		40	invasion ~~automatic~~	
16	instead		41	surrounded	
17	knew		42	favourite	
18	treasure		43	celebrations	
19	bouncing		44	quietly	
20	respectful		45	poisonous	
21	complained		46	magician	
22	dictionary		47	character	
23	parties		48	responsible	
24	discovered		49	marvellous	
25	halves		50	circumference	

Subtotal

Total

Appendix E: Interview Questions for Year 6 Teachers

1. How does you school facilitate effective transition from primary school to secondary school?
2. How do you facilitate effective transition from primary school to secondary school?
3. In what ways do teachers in this school collaborate to ensure students meet literacy demands across the curriculum?
4. How do you/does your school prepare students for the diversity of the Year 7 curriculum, both for literacy and other subjects?
5. If you had more time/resources, how would you enhance the transition experience for your students.
6. If you had more time/resources, how would you enhance the teaching of English/Literacy in your classroom?
7. How do you teach literacy? Describe the literacy practices that you use in your classroom.
8. How do you accommodate for the diversity of literacy skills within your classroom?
9. Describe the support and resources you have available to facilitate literacy development in your classroom.
10. How do you accommodate and help students who have low aspirations to progress? What strategies do you employ to motivate your students in literacy?
11. In your school/classroom, what strategies work well in assisting underperformers to improve their literacy skills?
12. Describe the students that you teach.
13. Describe how NAPLAN informs your teaching of English/Literacy.
14. Describe the programs that you use in your classroom to teach English/Literacy.
15. How do you teach spelling in your classroom?
16. How do you teach reading/comprehension in your classroom?
17. How do you teach writing in your classroom?
18. What programs does your school use to promote literacy development?
19. How many hours per week do you teach English/Literacy?

Appendix F: Interview Questions for Year 7 Teachers

1. How does you school facilitate effective transition from primary school to secondary school?
2. How do you facilitate effective transition from primary school to secondary school?
3. In what ways do teachers in this school collaborate to ensure students meet literacy demands across the curriculum?
4. How do you/does your school prepare students for the diversity of the Year 7 curriculum, both for literacy and other subjects?
5. If you had more time and resources, how would you enhance the transition experience for your students?
6. If you had more time and resources, how would you enhance the teaching of English/Literacy in your classroom?
7. How do you teach literacy? Describe the literacy practices that you use in your classroom.
8. How do you accommodate for the diversity of literacy skills within your classroom?
9. Describe the support and resources you have available to facilitate literacy development in your classroom.
10. How do you accommodate and help students who have low aspirations to progress? What strategies do you employ to motivate your students in literacy?
11. In your school/classroom, what strategies work well in assisting underperformers to improve their literacy skills?
12. Describe the students that you teach.
13. Describe how NAPLAN informs your teaching of English/Literacy.
14. Describe the programs that you use in your classroom to teach English/Literacy.
15. How do you teach spelling in your classroom?
16. How do you teach reading/comprehension in your classroom?
17. How do you teach writing in your classroom?
18. What programs does your school use to promote literacy development?
19. How many hours per week do you teach English/Literacy?

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Appendix G: Procedures for Administering the *Progressive Achievement Test in Reading (PAT-R)*

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Appendix H: Procedures for Administering the *Single Word Spelling Test (SWST)*

Administration instructions

This section contains guidance for teachers, teaching assistants and those responsible for administering the spelling tests.

Although each spelling test takes approximately 30 minutes to administer, the tests are not time-limited so pupils should be given as long as they need to complete them. The group of pupils to be tested should be given the test appropriate for their age/school year. Pupils with Special Educational Needs should be given the test appropriate for their ability (see section below). All pupils in the group should complete the entire test that has been selected as appropriate for them. The seating in the classroom should be arranged so that pupils cannot easily see another pupil's answer sheet. Testing conditions must be maintained for the duration of the test – the pupils should not talk, look at anyone else's work or try to help another pupil. Any words contained in the test that are on display in the classroom should be covered or taken down. The pupils should only have a pen or pencil and a copy of the pupil answer sheet on their desk.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Pupils whose spelling ability is judged to be approximately 18 months below their chronological age should be given the spelling test closest to their estimated spelling ability. The special needs teacher will need to use his or her discretion about which test is appropriate for an individual pupil. For example, a pupil aged 10 who has a spelling age of approximately 8 years should be given Test C for 8-year-olds. Similarly, pupils whose spelling ability is estimated as above average ability should be given a test appropriate for their level; if a pupil is judged to be spelling at a level two years above his or her chronological age, then he or she should be given that test. A small group of pupils taking the same test can be tested together.

Preparing the pupils for the *SWST*

The pupils should be asked to write the following details on their answer sheet:

- their first name and surname (family name)
- their date of birth and age (the teacher may choose to do this)
- their school
- their year group and class
- their gender
- the date.

3

The administrator should then say to the group:

> *I am going to give you a spelling test to see how well you can spell. Please do your best and write the words as neatly as you can. If you do not know how to spell a word, still have a go at it and write the letters that you think make up the word. Do not worry if you do not know a word, just do your best. As this is a test you know you must not talk, look at anyone else's work or let anyone see your work.*
>
> *The answer sheet is numbered from 1 to 50* [*1 to 30*, in the case of Test A, *1 to 35* for Test B, *1 to 45* for Test C] *with a space for each word. You must write one word on each line next to the number for that word. I am going to say each word once. Then I will say the word again in a sentence. Then I will say the word again. So you will hear each word three times. If you miss it the first time, listen very carefully because it will be repeated. When I have said the word you must write it down on the answer sheet, in the space provided. If you really did not hear the word, put your hand up and wait for me to ask you what the problem is.*
>
> *Try this practice word.*

The test administrator should then give the appropriate practice word for the age group being tested. The administrator should demonstrate the spelling of the practice word, showing where it should be written on the answer sheet.

Administering the main test

The administrator should proceed with the test, reading each word slowly and clearly, followed by the sentence (read verbatim) and then the word again. For the first five words in the test the administrator should say *'The word is …'* before saying the word for the final time. After the fifth word, this phrase can be left out and the word can be presented alone, followed by the sentence and then the repeated word.

Dealing with unexpected incidents

If a pupil does not hear a word clearly or has missed a word, the administrator should judge whether to repeat the word for the pupil. The administrator should use his or her discretion about whether to read the word again, bearing in mind that too many interruptions could disrupt the testing environment. At the beginning of the test, if a pupil requests a repetition of a word, the administrator might repeat the word and remind the group that they must listen carefully as the words may not be repeated again. The administrator must judge the pace of the test by observing the pupils' behaviour. If requests to repeat the words are frequently made, the administrator needs to ensure that the words are not being read too quickly. Similarly, if pupils appear to have time to be distracted during the test, then the administrator needs to ensure that the words are not being read too slowly. The administrator may find smaller groups easier to test. A group of pupils with average and above average ability could be tested together and another group of pupils with average and below average ability could be tested together. If the administrator has reason to suspect that particular pupils are likely to request many repetitions of the words, it is strongly advised that a small group, including these pupils, is tested separately from the class. It may be appropriate for these pupils to be tested by a teaching assistant.

Appendix I: Frequencies of Interview Responses (Codes)

The following tables contain a range of responses from grade 6 and grade 7 teachers in relation to each of the interview questions. The interview questions were open ended and therefore teachers were encouraged to give as much detail as possible. As a result, the responses given by teachers varied, with multiple answers given for a single question. Tables 1-15 contain the teacher responses for each of the interview questions. These responses were separated into three groups: primary teachers, secondary school teachers and district school teachers, to enable a comparison of the types of practices and programs teachers were using across the three school structures. The practices and programs utilised by teachers were both similar and dissimilar in regards to each of the interview questions.

Table 1.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 1

How does your school facilitate effective transition from primary school to high school?

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 1					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. School wide transition programs	14	74	0	7	7
2. Orientation days/school visits	19	100	5	7	7
3. Whole school curriculum approach	9	47	0	4	5
4. Parent information sessions	2	10	0	2	0
5. Activity days	7	37	3	4	0
6. Knowledge of student achievement	12	63	0	5	7
7. Communication between school staff	9	47	2	2	5
8. Support for students at risk	19	100	5	7	7
9. Literacy catch up program	3	16	0	0	3
10. Share/collect work sampls	5	26	0	2	3
11. Composite classes	6	42	3	1	4

Table 2.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 2					
How do you facilitate effective transition from primary school to high school					
Number of schools participated Number of schools participated in interviews	10 8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 2					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Separate "clicks" friendship groups	2	10	0	2	0
2. Ensure students reach grade level in literacy	13	58	4	0	7
3. Talk to students about secondary school expectations	6	31	4	2	0
4. Autobiographical Writing	2	10	0	2	0
5. Journal Writing	2	10	0	2	0
6. "Getting to know you" activities	4	21	0	4	0
7. Practice tests	2	10	0	2	0
8. Offer diverse programs to cater for individual needs	7	36	0	2	5
9. I do not do anything specific based around transition	7	36	3	3	1

Table 3.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3					
In what ways do teachers in this school collaborate to ensure students meet literacy demands across the curriculum?					
Number of schools participated Number of schools participated in interviews	10 8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 3					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Moderation	6	31	2	2	2
2. Teaching Team planning	15	79	5	5	5
3. Whole school planning	11	58	2	4	5
4. Share resources	19	100	5	7	7
5. Discuss students at risk	12	63	5	2	5
6. Common approach to literacy	11	58	2	4	5

Table 4.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 4

How do you prepare students for the diversity of the grade 7 English/literacy curriculum?

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 4					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Integrate subject areas	17	89	3	4.5	7
2. Promote student confidence	10	53	1	2	7
3. Whole school approach to literacy	11	68	2	4	7
4. Student support	12	63	3	2	7
5. Use of a common vocabulary across different subject areas	9	47	0	2	7
6. Teach literacy in all subject areas	9	47	0	2	7
7. Aim for students to achieve grade level	11	58	4	0	7
8. Enable students work with different teachers	14	74	3	4	7
9. Support teachers	12	63	3	2	7
10. Catch up program	2	16	0	0	3
11. Literacy Preparation	14	74	3	4	7
12. I do not focus on this	1	5	1	0	0

Table 5.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 5

If you had more time/resources, how would you enhance the transition experience for students?

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 5					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Share student work samples across schools	7	37	2	5	0
2. Greater familiarity with the primary/high school curriculum	13	58	5	7	1
3. Increase opportunity for visits between the primary/high school campuses	8	42	5	2	1
4. Increase the communication between primary schools and high schools	14	74	5	5	4
5. Be aware of the programs and practices used in grade 6 and grade 7	8	42	5	3	0
6. More resources to prepare students for high school literacy	15	79	5	5	5
7. Increase teacher support/aides	19	100	5	7	7
8. Reduce number of students entering high school with low literacy skills	6	31	5	0	1
9. Consistent Transition Programs	14	74	5	5	4
10. Regular staff meetings	19	100	5	7	7
11. Identify areas for student improvement	19	100	5	7	7
12. Collegial Support	19	100	5	7	7
13. Professional Development	16	84	5	4	7
14. More planning time	19	100	5	7	7

Table 6.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 6

If you had more time/resources, how would you enhance the teaching of English/literacy in your classroom?

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 6					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Increase the amount of planning time	19	100	5	7	7
2. Whole school literacy approach	3	16	0	2	1
3. Qualified literacy support staff	5	26	3	2	0
4. Smaller class sizes	6	31	3	2	1
5. Increased aide time	19	100	5	7	7
6. Access to age/gender appropriate resources	17	79	5	5	7
7. Access to technology in the classroom	6	31	2	2	2
8. (Grammar)resources	2	10	0	2	0
9. Sharing of resources	19	100	5	7	7
10. More parent help	1	5	0	0	1
11. Consistency between schools	2	10	0	2	0
12. Integration of subject areas	2	10	0	0	2

Table 7.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 7

Describe the literacy practices that occur in your classroom.

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 7					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Group work	8	42	5	0	3
2. Reciprocal Teaching	3	16	0	2	1
3. Grammar/Functional Grammar	8	42	2	3	3
4. Activities to promote engagement	6	31	3	2	1
5. Visual tasks	4	21	2	0	2
6. Writing Tasks	14.5	79	5	4	5
7. Weekly spelling tests	11	58	5	4	2
8. Silent reading	12	63	5	5	2
9. Reading groups	10	53	5	0	5
10. Teacher read aloud	3	16	1	2	0
11. Teaching text types	11	58	3	5	3
12. Class novel study	12	63	5	2	5
13. Integration	14	42	3	4	7
14. Make links to the real world	4	21	0	0	4
15. Use of Technology	1	84	1	0	0
16. Differentiated assessment opportunities	4	89	1	0	3

Table 8.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 8

How do you accommodate for the diversity of literacy skills within your classroom?

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 8					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Stream students into ability groups	9	63	5	2	5
2. Small group work	11	58	2	5	4
3. Differentiate classroom tasks	12	63	4	5	3
4. Utilise teacher support staff	4	21	1	0	3
5. Composite classes	8	42	3	3	2
6. Offer catch up programs for students who are underachieving	1	5	0	0	1
7. Cater for different student interests	4	21	0	2	2
8. Open ended activities	2	10	0	0	2
9. Vary assignment tasks	5	26	0	5	0
10. Use of technology	3	16	0	2	1

Table 9.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 9

Describe the support and resources you have available to facilitate literacy development in your classroom.

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 9					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Teacher's aides/support staff	16	84	4	5	7
2. Professional learning opportunities	16	84	4	5	7
3. Levelled texts/resources	13	68	4	2	7
4. Learning Support teachers	12	63	5	2	5
5. Outside classroom programs	5	26	3	2	0
6. Access to technology in the classroom	0	0	0	0	0
7. Team meetings	15	79	3	7	5
8. Trained literacy teachers within the school	9	47	5		4
9. I collect my own resources	6	31		4	2
10. Minimal resources and support due to funding	5	26	2	3	0

Table 10.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 10

What strategies do you employ to motivate students in literacy?

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 10					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Tap into students' interests	13	68	4	5	4
2. Short activities	5	26	1	3	1
3. Small group work	2	10	0	0	2
4. Set learning goals	2	10	0	0	2
5. Have high expectations	3	16	0	2	1
6. Technology	3	16	0	1	2
7. Use of different text types	5	26	1	3	1
8. Vary presentation of material	5	26	1	3	1
9. Open ended activities	2	10	0	2	0
10. Give students a choice	2	10	0	2	1
11. Utilise educational games	1	5	0	0	1
12. Structure activities with boundaries	2	10	0	2	0
13. Reward System	4	21	0	4	0
14. Offer outside class activities	5	26	3	2	0
15. Offer part time enrolments	2	10	0	2	0
16. Take students' advice	2	10	0	0	2
17. Target individual needs	6	31	2	2	2
18. Provide positive, immediate feedback	5	26	0	4	1
19. Make activities relevant to their lives	5	26	0	2	3
20. Low motivation is a problem in this school	4	21	2	2	0

Table 11.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 11

In your school/classroom, what strategies work well in assisting underperformers to improve their literacy skills?

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 11					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Knowing the background of the student	3	16	1	2	0
2. Routines and structure	4	21	1	2	1
3. Group work	4	21	1	3	0
4. Explicit Teaching	1	5	1	0	0
5. Learning Support sessions	6	31	1	2	3
6. Teacher's aide in the classroom	2	10	0	2	0
7. Differentiating tasks appropriately	5	26	1	4	0
8. Positive reinforcement/feedback	13	68	1	7	5
9. Engagement activities in the classroom	9	47	0	5	4
10. Encourage verbal communication	3	16	0	0	3
11. Base activities on their interests	8	42	0	5	3
12. Allow students to present work indifferent formats	3	16	0	3	0
13. Maintain regular contact with parents	4	21	0	2	2

Table 12.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS 14

Describe the programs you use in your classroom to teach literacy.

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 12					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Writer's Notebook	9	63	5	2	2
2. Words Their Way	3	16	3	0	0
3. CSI for Comprehension	2	10	2	2	0
4. Reader's Notebook	3	16	0	0	3
5. My Own Learning (Spelling)	3	16	3	0	0
6. Carol Christensen	6	21	0	6	2
7. Reading to Learn	3	16	3	0	0
8. First Steps	7	37	0	5	2
9. Single Word Spelling Test	3	16	3	0	0
10. Spelling Memo/journal	5	26	0	0	5
11. Primary Connections	1	5	1	0	0
12. Lexia	2	10	0	2	0
13. No specific programs used	2	10	0	2	0

*SS uses CC program but no other programs
*NN/LD/CHS no specific spelling program
*SMHS no programs

Table 13.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 15

How do you teach spelling in your classroom

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 13					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Dictionary meanings	5	26	0	3	2
2. Break words into syllables	4	21	0	3	1
3. Drawing/crosswords/alphabetical order	3	16	0	3	0
4. Phonemes/sounds/letter patterns	3	16	2	0	1
5. Ability groups	4	21	2	0	2
6. Weekly spelling tests	11	58	2	7	2
7. Look, say, cover, write, check (LSCWC)	6	31	1	2	3
8. Integrate spelling with classroom topics	6	31	2	2	2
9. Spelling memo/journal	6	31	0	2	4
10. Word origins	4	21	0	2	2
11. Latin roots	2	10	0	2	0
12. Whole school spelling program	10	53	5	0	5
13. Set homework tasks	3	16	0	2	1
14. I create my own program	11	58	1	7	3

Table 14.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 16

How do you teach reading/comprehension in your classroom?

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 14					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Group students according to ability	12	63	5	2	5
2. Integrate reading with other subjects	14	74	3	4	7
3. Silent reading	10	53	5	2	3
4. Comprehension activities	9	47	2	3	4
5. Shared reading	7	37	2	3	2
6. Guided Reading	5	26	2	3	0
7. Pre, present, post activities	1	5	0	0	1
8. Teach text vocabulary	1	5	0	0	1
9. Chapter questions	3	16	0	3	0
10. Present information visually	1	5	0	0	1
11. Inferring	3	16	2	0	1
12. Teacher read aloud	5	26	0	2	3
13. Library reading sessions	2	10	0	2	0
14. Digital resources	5	26	2	0	3
15. Novel study	12	63	5	2	5
16. Reciprocal teaching	2	10	0	2	0
17. Whole school reading program	12	63	5	2	5
18. Do not teach reading	2	10	0	2	0

Table 15.

RESPONSES TO QUESTION 17

How do you teach writing in your classroom?

Number of schools participated	10				
Number of schools participated in interviews	8				
Number of interviews conducted	19		**Primary Teachers N= 5**	**High Teachers N= 7**	**District Teachers N= 7**
Total number of response items to question 15					
Category	**No of teachers identifying each category of responses**	**% of teachers interviewed**	**Primary School**	**High School**	**District School**
1. Text Types	11	58	2	7	2
2. Activities from text books	3	16	0	3	0
3. Integrate with other topics	4	21	0	0	4
4. Modelling	2	10	0	2	0
5. Journal writing	9	47	4	2	3
6. Handwriting skills	2	10	0	2	0
7. Engaging topics	7	37	4	2	1
8. Visual Tasks	3	16	1	0	2
9. Link writing with real life experiences	1	5	0	0	1
10. Whole school writing program	17	89	5	7	5
11. I do not teach writing	0	0	0	0	0

Appendix J: List of Constructed Categories

Categories

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW RESULTS	%
1. Methods for facilitating effective transition	
School-wide transition programs	79
Orientation days	100
Whole school curriculum approach	47
Knowledge of student achievement	63
Support for students at risk	100
Literacy catch-up programs	10
I do not do anything	
2. Teacher suggestions for enhancing the transition experience	
Familiarity with the primary school/high school curriculum	58
Communication between schools and staff	74
Appropriate resources (includes people	79
Increase in teacher support/teacher's aides	100
Increased planning time	100
Consistent transition programs	74
3. Teacher suggestions for enhancing the teaching of English/literacy	
Smaller class sizes	31
Increase amount of age/gender appropriate resources	79
Access to technology in the classroom	31
4. Preparing students for the grade 7 curriculum	
Integrate subject areas	89
Provide student support	63
Enable students to work with different teachers	74
Whole school approach to literacy	68
Ensure students reach grade level	58
5. Most common literacy practices	
Writing tasks/teaching text types	79
Reading groups/ activities	53
General group work	42
Weekly spelling tests/activities	58
6. Most common literacy programs	
Writer's Notebook	63
Carol Christensen program	21
First Steps: Writing and Reading	37
I do not use any specific programs	10
7. Methods for Supporting Underachievers/Low Motivation	
Positive reinforcement/feedback	68
Engagement activities	47
Learning support sessions	31
Activities based on student interest	42
Target individual needs	31
8. Methods for Ensuring Students meet literacy curriculum demands	
Regular staff meetings	100
Share resources	100
Identify areas for student improvement	100
Staff support/team planning	53
Professional Development	84
Team Planning	79
9. Supporting Student Diversity	

Streaming	63
Small Group work	58
Differentiation	63
Composite classes	42
10. Support and resources available to facilitate literacy development	
Teacher's aides/support staff	84
Professional learning	84
Team meetings	79
Learning support teachers	63
Levelled texts/resources	68
11. Practices for Teaching Spelling	
Weekly spelling tests	58
LSCWC	31
Integration	31
Spelling memo/journal	31
Whole school spelling program	53
12. Practices for Teaching Reading	
Student ability groups	63
Novel study	58
Silent reading	53
Comprehension activities	47
Integration	89
Whole school reading program	37
I d not teach reading	10
13. Practices for Teaching Writing	
Focus on text types	58
Journal writing	47
Engaging topics	37
Whole school writing program	37